ゼロの使い魔
4
〈誓約の水精霊〉
ヤマグチノボル
MF文庫
J

# Novel Illustrations

# ゼロの使い魔 4

〈誓約の水精霊〉

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## ゼロの使い魔4　誓約の水精霊

異世界ハルケギニアに使い魔として「召喚」された才人は、相変わらずご主人様であるルイズに犬扱いされていた。ある日、ルイズは敵軍を撃退した件で、王女アンリエッタに呼び出される。ルイズが伝説の「虚無」の使い手として知れ渡り、敵に狙われることがないよう、心を砕いてくれる王女。そんな彼女に改めて忠誠を誓うルイズと、ルイズを助けることを約束させられる才人。だが、全てがうまく収まったように見える裏で、アンリエッタは好きだった亡きウェールズ王子を想って沈んでいた。そんな彼女の心につけいるように、敵軍レコン・キスタの策略が動きはじめ……異世界を舞台にしたラブ＆ドラマティックストーリー、第4弾！

## ヤマグチノボル（やまぐち・のぼる）

1972年2月、茨城県生まれ。『カナリア～この想いを歌にのせて』（角川スニーカー文庫）でデヴュー。著書に『グリーングリーン鐘ノ音ファンタスティック』『つっぱれ有栖川』（共に角川スニーカー文庫）『描きかけのラブレター』（富士見ミステリー文庫）『グリーングリーン鐘ノ音スタンド・バイ・ミー』（MF文庫J）など多数。小説連載も数多く手がけている（富士見ファンタジアバトルロイヤル等）。『グリーングリーン』『Gonna Be??』『ゆきうた』『私立アキハバラ学園』『魔界天使ジブリール』『そらうた』など、ゲームシナリオライターとしても活躍中。

Illustration

### ◎兎塚エイジ（うさつか・えいじ）

大阪出身、大阪在住の大阪人。8月16日生まれ。
現在、サラリーマンをしながらイラストを描かせて頂いてます。
今までの参加作品は「道士さまといっしょ」（電撃文庫）です。

カバーイラスト／兎塚エイジ　装丁／blue

# ゼロの使い魔 4

〈誓約の水精霊〉

ヤマグチノボル

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ウェールズ
アルビオンの皇太子。アンリエッタとは相思相愛だったが、レコン・キスタ軍の攻撃で死亡。
アンリエッタ
トリステインの王女。幼い頃からウェールズのことが好きだった。
サイト（平賀才人）
ルイズの使い魔。伝説の使い魔「ガンダールヴ」として、様々な武器が扱える。元は地球のフツーの高校生。
モンモランシー
ルイズの同級生。水系統の魔法を得意とする、目立ちたがり屋の女の子。二つ名は「香水」。
ルイズ
才人のご主人様。魔法は失敗してばかりのおちこぼれだったが、伝説の「虚無」の系統を操れることが判明。二つ名は「ゼロ」。

# ゼロの使い魔4

## 誓約の水精霊

ヤマグチノボル

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# Prologue

The Ragdorian Lake in between the Kingdoms of Tristain and Gallia was one of Halkeginia's most beautiful places. It spanned across six hundred square kilometers and its width could be compared to that of the distance between Tristania, the capital of Tristain, and the Academy of Magic. The lake was located on relatively high ground, and was as beautiful as any painting. The lush green of the forests woven with the clear water of the lake was a masterpiece which couldn't have possibly been made by a god carelessly waving his axe around.

However, that lake was not something humans owned. It was a place inhabited by the water spirits, who were the original inhabitants of Halkeginia. It was the paradise of the water spirits who had a much longer history than the humans. The water spirits had made a castle and town at the bottom of the lake and developed their own culture and kingdom. It was said that those who saw it, no matter how evil they were, would turn over a new leaf.

These water spirits were called the spirits of oath and it was said that oaths made by them would never be broken. That being said… the water spirits, who were said to surpass the beauty of the woven colors of the forest, the sky and the lake, rarely appeared in front of humans. Tens of years ago, they had appeared once to renew their oath with the royal family of Tristain, but since then, they had not come up from the depths of the lake. Which is why, even though it was said that "oaths made by them would never be broken", it was an extremely difficult task to prove it.

The first time Henrietta and Wales met was at that Ragdorian Lake. It was three years ago… Celebrating the Queen Marianne's birthday, the Kingdom of Tristain invited guests from each nation and held a large garden party at the Ragdorian

Lake. The nobles and royals invited from all over Halkeginia - the Kingdom of Albion, the Kingdom of Gallia, and the empire of Germania, gathered at the lake all dressed up and socialized to their hearts content. Fireworks of magic were set off, and under a large tent, a ball was held throughout the night with the world's finest food and wine prepared.

On the night at the end of the first week, as the celebrations were half over, the fourteen year old Henrietta left her tent and made her way to the shore of the lake without any attendants or guards. She was tired of the celebrations, which seemed to stretch on forever. The days had been packed with events, such as feasts, dance balls, poetry recitals… She was already fed up with all the greetings and flattery. She wanted to be alone and take in some fresh air.

She had passed through the area where the tents and buildings stood with her face hidden under a large hood and had made her way to the quiet bank side. The moon shone brightly, creating an illusionary atmosphere. Captivated by the sight, Henrietta simply stared at the river, which reflected the dazzlingly bright moon. It seemed that just being captivated by the sight did not satisfy her. Henrietta looked around herself. After making sure that no one was around, she boldly slipped off her dress. With a mischievous smile arising on her beautiful face, she slowly made her way into the water.

The cool water enveloped her body. It was just the beginning of summer, so the coolness felt pleasant in the warm night. She would be scolded if she were to be found in such a place by the chamberlain La Porte, but she had endured the constrained garden party for so long. *I'll be forgiven for something like this, Henrietta whispered as she began to swim out.* After swimming for a while, she suddenly sensed someone on the bank side. Henrietta's face became red and she hid her body with her hands.

"Who is it?"

The figure did not reply. Who could it be? The annoying chamberlain La Porte? Her friend who was one year younger than her, Louise Françoise? However she had snuck out of the tent without any of them noticing. Becoming uneasy, she demanded for the person's identity.

"Insolence. Name yourself." Her panicking voice reached the bank side.

"I'm no one suspicious. I was only out for a stroll. Why are you out here

swimming at a time like this?”

Henrietta was offended by his composed manner, even though he had been watching her swim all this time.

“I asked for your name didn’t I? Even though it may not look like it, I am the princess of a certain country. Before things turn ugly, state your name and leave.”

Hearing this, the figure was taken aback.

“A princess? Could it be, Henrietta?”

Henrietta was surprised at the absence of the address of ‘princess’. There were only five people gathered at the lake who could address her in such a manner. It would be unbelievable insolence if he weren’t one of those five people.

“Who are you?”

Henrietta had taken off the mask of a princess and questioned the figure in the voice of a frightened girl.

The figure laughed. Being laughed at, Henrietta blushed.

“It’s me Henrietta, Wales. Wales from Albion. Your cousin!”

“Wales..? You mean, Prince Wales?”

Prince Wales. The crown prince of Albion. They had never met before, but she of course knew of his name. The eldest son of the brother of her late father. She blushed even more deeply.

“I arrived here tonight with my father. I thought I’d just have a glimpse at the Ragdorian Lake because it’s so famous. Sorry for scaring you.”

“Geez, I can't believe you.”

With her clothes on, Henrietta turned towards Wales.

“You can turn around now”

Wales had turned away while Henrietta was changing. At the instant he turned around, something ran across Henrietta's spine for the first time in her life. Her body, cold from the lake became hot as though a fire had scorched her. She shyly smiled at his gallant looks. It seemed as though Wales had felt the same sensation as Henrietta.

"I'm surprised. You've grown beautiful, Henrietta…"

The astonished prince drew out moving words from his mouth.

"I-I haven't at all…" Looking downwards, Henrietta couldn't lift her face.

“I didn’t mean to surprise you. I was just taking a stroll and I heard some splashing… When I came here, I realized someone was swimming. Sorry. I couldn’t help but gaze.”

“Why were you gazing?”

“Aren’t the water spirits that live in this lake drawn to the moonlight? I wished to see them just once. The beauty of the water spirits are said to put the two moons into shame.”

Henrietta smiled.

“Sorry that it was me then”

Scratching his cheek in an embarrassed fashion, he earnestly said: “Not at all. I haven’t seen a water spirit before but…”

“But?”

“You are more beautiful. More beautiful than a water spirit.”

Embarrassed, Henrietta hid her face.

“People from Albion are so good at jokes.”

“I-It’s not a joke! I’m a prince you know. I haven’t told a lie, not even once! I really think you are more beautiful” Replied Wales, panicking.

Henrietta’s pulse hastened as though a spell had been cast on her. The cousin in front of her… A prince from another country, whom she only knew by name. The boring garden party, had suddenly become beautifully colorful whilst they stood before the sparkling Ragdorian Lake.

Their relationship grew quite intimate although it didn’t take that much time. They understood each other’s feelings just by looking at each other’s eyes and they also understood well that their time together was limited. At every night of

the garden party, Wales and Henrietta would meet by the lake. Henrietta would hide her face with a large hood, and Wales would use a phantom mask which was used in the masked ball. The signal of their rendezvous was the sound of a small stone thrown into the lake. The person who had arrived first would reveal themselves from the thicket from which they were hiding, and after checking no one was around, they would use a password.

After Wales said “On the night the wind blows”, Henrietta would reply with “an oath of the water I pledge.”

On a particular day, the two were walking by the lake holding hands.

“You were pretty late Henrietta, I almost became tired of waiting”

“Sorry. The feast just stretched on. I’m so sick of drunk ramblings already.”

“But… Is it really alright for you to sneak away like that every night?”

Henrietta giggled at Wales worried look.

“It’s alright. I’m using a decoy”

“A decoy! That’s something pretty serious.”

“It’s not that big of a deal. That friend of mine you saw with me at lunch the other day…”

“You mean that skinny girl with long hair?”

Wales tilted his head. The girl that would follow Henrietta around and play with her. He was so captivated by Henrietta that he couldn’t really recall her look. However, he did vaguely remember her hair color.

“Yes. She dresses up like me, and then goes into my bed for me. The blanket covers her right to the tip of her head so even if anyone stands beside the bed, they can’t see her face.”

“But, isn’t her hair color different to yours? If I remember correctly, hers is pink while yours is…”

Wales brushed Henrietta’s hair with his hand.

“A beautiful chestnut color. That would be a fairly bad decoy.”

“I’ve concocted a special magic hair dye. But, I feel a bit guilty. I didn’t actually say that I was meeting you. She thinks that I am just out for a stroll.”

“You’re so cunning!” Wales said while laughing.

“Shh! Don’t laugh so loud. We don’t know if anyone is listening.”

“No one is going to be here listening at this hour of the night except for the water spirits. Ah, I want to see them at least once. I wonder what kind of beauty makes the moon jealous.”

Pouting her lips, she replied to her lover with a troubling tone

“Oh, I see now. So you didn’t actually want to meet with me. You just wanted to see the water spirit, and have me tag along.”

Wales suddenly stopped and grasped Henrietta’s cheeks gently in both his hands and approached her lips. Henrietta was surprised, but soon closed her eyes. Their lips pressed together. After a while, Wales moved his face away.

“I love you, Henrietta.”

“I also love you.” Henrietta whispered, blushing furiously.

A tinge of loneliness was reflected in Wales’ eyes. While he was entranced by the idea of their love, a composed part of his mind also imagined its conclusion. Their status did not allow them to be with each other. If anyone knew about their relationship… they probably wouldn’t even be allowed to see each other in formal events. It was a part of being a princess and a prince.

Wales began to speak, trying to brighten the atmosphere.

“Hahaha… We’ve both been born with troubling destinies haven’t we. Most of the time we’ve spent together has been at night, with a disguise! It would be good, at least just once, if I could walk by this lake with just you and the sun.”

Henrietta closed her eyes and slowly nestled against his chest.

“Then make an oath.”

“An oath?”

“Yes. The water spirits living here are also known as the ‘spirits of oath’. Oaths made before them are said to be unbreakable.” whispered the fourteen year old Henrietta while she hid her face.

“It’s a superstition. Just an old folk’s tale”

“Even if it’s a superstition, I believe it. If by believing, it will grant me my oath, then I will believe forever. Forever…”

A tear dropped from her eyelashes and rolled down on her cheek. Wales gently stroked Henrietta’s cheek.

“I love you, Henrietta, because you love me so much. So don’t cry like that. The river will overflow with your tears. The people gathered here will drown, you know.”

“You probably don’t know how much I love you. The more serious I get the more you tease me.”

“Don’t be like that Henrietta”

Lifting the hem of her skirt, Henrietta made her way into the water.

“The princess of Tristain Henrietta vows before the spirits of water that she will love Prince Wales for eternity.”

“You're next Wales. Make an oath like I just did.”

Wales entered the water and embraced Henrietta. Henrietta clung to his shoulder.

“Wales?”

“Your feet will get cold.”

“I don’t mind. Rather than that, I made an oath that I will love you forever. Make

an oath as well.”

“Unbreakable oaths are just a superstition.”

“Are you saying that you will have a change of heart?”

Wales went silent for a while, deep in thought.

With a gentle expression, he cast his oath into the lake.

“The prince of Albion, Wales, vows before the water spirits that he will one day walk on this Ragdorian Lake with princess Henrietta and the sun, hand in hand.”

“I made the oath.”

Henrietta buried her face into Wales’ chest and whispered quietly to herself.

“…So you won’t vow to love me?”

The surface of the lake twinkled with light. Then after a while the lake was once again engulfed in silence.

The two looked at each other.

Was it the moon light, or was it the spirits of the water accepting their oaths, they didn’t know… but nestling against each other they continued to gaze at the beautiful lake of Ragdorian.

# Chapter One: The Saint

On the Bourdonné Street in the town below the Tristain castle, a magnificent parade was being held in commemoration of their victory. The parade was led by Princess Henrietta's chariot, which was pulled along by the legendary beasts known as unicorns. Renowned nobles in their chariots followed after her. Around them, the magical defence squad served as their bodyguards.

The narrow road was filled with spectators. People cheered as they watched from the windows and roofs of the buildings as the chariots passed by.

"Long live Princess Henrietta!"

"Long live Tristain!"

The crowd was extremely enthusiastic. Princess Henrietta had led the Tristain forces to victory at the Plains of Tarbes the other day against the Albion forces who had broken their treaty. Princess Henrietta, who had defeated the enemy which outnumbered them, was praised as a 'saint' and was as popular as it was possible.

After the parade was over, a coronation was awaiting Henrietta, in which she was to assume the throne. This was proposed by Cardinal Mazarini, with most of the court's nobles and cabinet ministers agreeing.

The marriage of the prince of the neighboring country, Germania, with Henrietta was canceled, much to their disappointment. After all, they could not afford to be unyielding to a country that defeated the invading forces of Albion.

Of course, cancellation of the alliance was out of the question. Tristain was a strong country that Germania, who was frightened of the wrath of Albion, could not afford to be without.

In other words, Henrietta had gained her freedom through her own hands.

A party of the defeated Albion soldiers were watching the triumphant return in the corner of the plaza. They were the nobles of the Albion forces who were taken as prisoners. Even though they were prisoners, they were treated fairly well. Their wands were confiscated, but they were not tied up, and could freely stand. Guards were placed around them, but none of them were thinking of escaping. When nobles are captured as prisoners, they undergo an oath. If they were to break that oath, then their honour and name would turn into ashes. For nobles, who valued honour very highly, it was equivalent to death.

Within that party of people, there was a scorched man with a bold face. It was Sir Bowood, who was the captain of the Lexington warship, which Louise sunk by engulfing it in flames with her Void magic. He nudged at the noble beside him and spoke to him.

“Look Horatio, It’s the ‘saint’ who defeated us”

The noble called Horatio turned his fat figure and replied.

“Hm… There hasn’t been an enthronement of a princess in Halkeginia before. Even though they defeated us, the war still isn’t over. Furthermore, isn’t she a bit young?”

“Horatio, you should study some history. There’s been one instance in Gallia and two in Tristain where the princess has been enthroned.”

Horatio scratched his head.

“History you say? If so, we’re just a ribbon decorating the first page of Saint Henrietta’s brillant history. That light! Not only did it annihilate my ship but yours as well!”

Bowood nodded. That ball of light which shone above the Lexington expanded to a huge size in just a matter of seconds. Not only did it cause the fleet to be engulfed in flames but it also destroyed the ‘wind stones’ on board the ships, causing them to sink towards the ground.

What was even more surprising, was that the light did not kill a single person. The light destroyed the fleet, but had no effect on the people. They managed to glide down onto the ground with what little control they had left. The flames did injure many people but there were no casualties.

“A miraculous light… I can’t believe it. I haven’t even heard or seen that kind of magic before. Our country has chosen a fearsome enemy.” Bowood whispered.

He called out to a soldier who was holding a large halberd.

“You. Yes, you.”

Raising his eyebrows the soldier approached Bowood.

“Did you call for me, Your Excellency?"

No matter if the person was an enemy or ally, nobles were to be treated with respect. The soldier waited for Bowood’s words in a polite manner.

“My subordinates aren’t locked up are they? Are they being fed properly?”

“The soldiers who were captured are being gathered and are being invited into the Tristain forces. There is compulsory labour imposed on them but most of them should be aspiring to join our forces. After all, it was a big victory. Don’t worry about their stomachs, Tristain is not such a poor country as to be considering whether or not to give prisoners food.”

“Here’s a cup to celebrate the ‘saint’s’ victory.”

The soldier laughed.

“Allow me to offer a cup to Your Excellency’s health.”

Feeling cheerful, Bowood whispered while he watched the soldier leave.

“If this annoying war ends and you go back home, what would you do, Horatio?”

“I’m going to retire from the army. I wouldn’t even mind if I gave up my wand, after seeing that light.”

Bowood laughed loudly.

“We think alike! I feel exactly the same”

A smile arose on Cardinal Mazarini’s face while he sat next to Henrietta. It was a smile that he had not shown for ten years, a smile without worry. Opening the carriage windows, he waved his hands in response to the deafening cheer of the crowd. He was glad that the two weights on his shoulders were lightened. Internal administration and diplomacy. He was considering leaving them to Henrietta and acting as an advisor himself.

Mazarini noticed that his new lord had a sad expression on her face. Tweaking his moustache, he asked her, “It seems that you are not feeling happy. I haven’t seen you cheerful since you’ve stepped in this carriage.”

“Why must I take the throne? Mother is here isn’t she?”

“She won’t even respond if we call her ‘Your Majesty the Queen.’ She said that she is not a king, merely the king’s wife and your mother, and she would definitely not accept the crown.”

“Why did my mother refuse to accept?”

A sad expression came over Mazarini’s face.

“The queen is still mourning. She still longs for your late father.”

Henrietta sighed.

“Then I’ll just be like my mother. The throne can remain empty. The coronation won’t proceed.”

“Don’t say such selfish things! Your coronation is something your mother has hoped for as well. Tristain cannot be a weak country right now. The nobles and citizens of Tristain, our allied countries as well, are hoping for you to take the throne.”

Henrietta sighed again. She looked at the wind ruby on her left ring finger. It was the ring which Saito had brought back to her, a memento of Wales'. The victory that had ascended her to the throne… was in a sense Wales' victory. The ring had given Henrietta courage to face the enemy.

*If mother left the throne empty because she was longing for father… then I want to do the same. I don't want to become a queen.*

But she could hear the crowd's cheers. As if admonishing, Mazarini quietly whispered.

"The citizens are all hoping for the coronation. Your Excellency's body is already something that is not yours."

With a cough, he continued.

"I'll explain the procedures of the coronation. So that you won't make any mistakes."

"It's only wearing a crown… Why is it such a big fuss."

"Don't say such things. It's a holy ritual. It's a ritual where you bear the power bestowed by the founders and declare it to the world. The procedures are all a tradition."

In an air of importance, Mazarini explained the procedures.

"…Then, when the ritual is finished, your excellency will approach the queen at the altar. You will state the written vow to the founders and the gods and your mother will place the crown on you. Then everyone in Halkeginia, including me, will be addressing you as 'Your Majesty'."

A vow…

Pledging something that she didn't really hold true in her heart… isn't that blasphemy? Thought Henrietta.

*I just can't think of myself as queen. That victory… the victory at Tarbes that ascended me to the throne was not through my leadership, but by the abundant experience and wit of the generals and Mazarini. I was only leading, I didn't do*

*anything else. If Wales were alive right now, what would he say to me? Me, who's been given the duty of rising to the apex of power…*

Wales.

My dear Wales.

The only person I have loved…

Before that or even after that, the only time I have truly vowed with the words ringing true with my heart has been that one time in the Ragdorian Lake. The great victory and the brilliance of the coronation did not lighten Henrietta's heart from such thoughts.

She blankly stared at the parchment in her hands.

It was the report that had been delivered to Henrietta the other day. Recorded there was the interrogation of the prisoners done by a guard. There was something written about Saito's Zero fighter shooting down the dragoons. A prisoner who had been a dragoon said that it flew with great agility and used powerful magic based attacks, shooting down his allies one by one. But, such a dragoon did not exist in the Tristain forces. Puzzled by this, the guard had investigated further in the matter. A report from the village of Tarbes continued. The 'dragon' the dragoon was using was in fact a magical item called the Dragon's Raiment belonging to the Village of Tarbes. But it seems like it wasn't a magical item, but instead an unknown machinery.

The one who was controlling it was the familiar of her friend, La Vallière. And… there was a slight hint of information regarding the light which destroyed the enemy fleet as well. That light had appeared near the flying machine. The guard had made quite a hypothesis, that La Vallière and her familiar were the source of that light. However, the guard seemed troubled whether to directly contact the two. The report ended with a request for further directions regarding the investigation.

*The light which brought me victory.*

The intense light that resembled the sun.

Even by thinking about the light her body grew warm.

“Was it you, Louise?” Whispered Henrietta quietly.

Meanwhile, in contrast to the excitement on Bourdonné street, the same old repetitive days continued on for the Academy of Magic. The headmaster of the academy, Osman, had praised the victory of the Kingdom’s forces at Tarbes, but other than that, nothing else had happened.

But then again, they were in a school, an environment that had no place for things like politics. Even in the midst of war, the students were off somewhere doing their own things. For the nobles of Halkeginia, war was something that occurred every year. There was always some quarrel somewhere in the world. And when things got more serious, there would be an uproar, but when the battles had settled, things would be like always.

Within this process, another little war had been set in motion in the quiet Vestri courtyard.

On a bench under the warm sun, Saito opened the package in his hands.

His face shone brightly.

“Wow! That’s great! A muffler!”

A blushing Siesta sat next to him.

“Well, um, what was it called… an aeroplane? It’s cold when you’re riding that right?”

It was three hours past noon. Since Siesta had something to give him, she had told him to go to the Vestri courtyard. And the present was a muffler. A muffler as white as snow. It was warm like Siesta’s soft skin.

“Yeah! It does get quite cold when I open the windshield.”

Saito wrapped it around his neck to try it on. It was the start of summer, but the skies were cold and all the more cold when the windshield was open. During

takeoff and landing he needed to stretch his head outside of the windshield to check below him. It was different from the modern aeroplanes where they could do everything with the windshield closed.

On the white muffler, words were written with black knitting wool. At first they looked with letters from the alphabet but on closer inspection they were Halkeginian characters, quite different from the alphabet.

“What does this say?”

“Hm? Ah, you can’t read our words because you’re from another world. Um, your name is written there.”

“I see.”

Saito was moved. “Ah, so that’s how my name is written in this world’s characters” he thought while looking at it with fascination. Four characters were grouped together, which was probably pronounced “Saito”. Close to that group of characters was another group of six.

“How about this?”

“Eheh… that’s my name. Sorry, I couldn’t help myself. You don’t like it?”

“N-No, that's not it!”

Saito frantically shook his head.

“I’m really happy that you knit a muffler for me.”

It was the first time in his life that he had received a present from a girl. He remembered the tragedies that had happened every year. His birthday was on a national holiday so school was off. He hadn’t had a single girlfriend to congratulate him. Only once, did his mother give a watch to him, which broke the following day. On Valentine’s Day, there was actually one time where his seat was mixed up with the person’s next to him and a chocolate was placed in his desk.

“Who is it?! Who is it that likes me?! I’ll most likely like you as well!!” he shouted, dancing around in joy. An ordinary looking girl came up to him and

said “Sorry, got the seats mixed up.” Embarrassed at his own excitement he ended up sulking in the toilets.

And so, receiving a present from a girl was enough to make him teary. The fact that it was hand made raised Siesta’s charm by 120%. The usual cute Siesta had been elevated to the status of an angel.

“But is it really alright to give this to me? It must have been a lot of work to knit this.” Saito said quietly.

“It’s ok. You know, when the Albion forces attacked I was so scared. But when I heard the battle had ended and came out of the forest, you had already landed with that aeroplane right?”

Saito nodded.

“I was really, really happy. Which is why I…”

The two found themselves blushing. Siesta had hugged Saito and kissed him on the cheek during that time.

The village people came out of the forest soon after. Many of them had been intently watching Saito defeat the enemy dragoons with his Zero fighter. They had praised Saito and Louise as heroes for crushing the enemies. Celebrations were held for three days and three nights, and both of them received treatment as fine as royalty. They had also restored Siesta’s grandfather’s honour, as they proved the Zero fighter could really fly.

During the feast, Siesta had diligently attended to Saito and had drawn closer to him. At this moment, her body was also leaning lightly against him.

Confused, Saito fiddled with the muffler around his neck.

"Uh?"

He noticed something.

“Siesta, the muffler is quite long…”

“Hehe… that’s because it’s made for doing this.”

Siesta took the end of the muffler and wrapped it around her own neck. When she did that, the muffler’s length was just right.

“I-It’s made for two people?”

“Yep. You don’t like it?”

There was an incredible charm as Siesta looked into his eyes after saying that. It was as if she had the eyes of a loving puppy.

*A muffler made for two… what are you, the perfect maid? A maid like you would be sentenced to death in Japan, y-y-you…*

Saito’s thoughts had started to not make sense. Siesta’s maid-like manner had landed a critical hit in his mind.

Siesta launched another attack. Closing her eyes she pouted her lips and leaned towards him.

Saito gulped. His reaction would make him press his lips against hers. But… the memory of her father’s words during the banquet resurfaced in his mind. He had approached Saito when Siesta had left her seat for a while. He praised Saito as the hero of the village, as he had defeated the dragoons from Albion. His smiling face however quickly wore a much more sinister expression as he directed a bloodcurdling glare at Saito.

“You’re the saviour of this village, and the hero that protected Tristain from Albion. I love you for that. But…”

“Um, but what?”

“If you make my daughter cry, I will kill you."

Saito would never forget her father’s face as he said that. It was more daunting than orcs, dragoons, even Louise’s magic that destroyed the enemy fleet.

He couldn’t just carelessly make a move on Siesta. He was someone who had to return home after all… If he kissed her, then he would make Siesta sad. And if that happened, Siesta’s father would probably follow him to Earth and hunt him down. The terror that his face had emitted was menacing enough to stop him from laughing off the idea.

But, as Siesta’s lips approached even closer, his hesitation had started to feeble.

Since Saito wasn't moving any closer, it seemed Siesta was planning to close the distance between them herself. Grabbing Saito's head, she daringly drew him in. Siesta was a girl who was unbelievably daring when she wanted to be. Saito couldn't resist.

*Ah, no…but if it's only a kiss then.…* He thought as his body stiffened.

And with loud thud, Saito fainted from a large rock thrown at his head.

About 15 metres behind the bench where Siesta and Saito were seated, there was a gaping hole in the ground. In it was a girl catching her breath. It was none other than Louise.

Louise stamped her feet. Beside her was the large mole that had dug the hole, Verdandi, and the intelligent sword, Derflinger. After making Guiche's mole dig the hole, Louise had hid in it, popping her head up to quietly watch over Saito and Siesta. She had brought Derflinger along since she had some things she wanted to ask him.

"What's with that familiar?!"

Grumbling, she hit the wall of the hole with her fist.

"Don't die Saito!" could be heard from the bench as Siesta tended to Saito. Louise had thrown the rock that had hit Saito in the head. It was unforgivable to kiss another girl since he was her familiar.

"Hey, noble girl." said Derflinger with an expressionless voice.

"What? Start remembering my name already."

"Who cares about that? Moreover, has it become popular to dig holes to watch over familiars?"

"Why would it be popular?"

"Then why are you peeping from this hole?"

"If I'm seen I'm going to look bad." Louise said while glaring at the sword.

“Then isn’t it better to just stop peeping at him? It’s okay to leave him to do whatever he likes right?”

“No it’s not okay. That idiot familiar, without even consulting me, would spend a whole day f-f-f-flirting with that girl.”

Louise’s voice had started to shake when she reached the word “flirting.” She was quite angry.

“I might even be the legendary ‘Void’ mage yet I can’t even find anyone to talk it over with. I was even going to find that useless, incompetent fool of a familiar of mine but he was off somewhere f-f-f-flir…”

“F-f-f-flir-”

“Don’t copy me!”

“But, wasn’t throwing a rock a bit too much? My partner could have even died.”

Louise crossed her arms while sitting in the hole.

“Flirting somewhere without even fulfilling the duty of a familiar; he’s still 10 years early for that!”

“Jealousy.”

“No. You’re wrong.”

As Louise turned her blushing face away, Derflinger imitated Louise’s tone of speech.

“Why would he not try to kiss me?”

“Be quiet.”

“I was even pretending to be asleep. I’ll cry you know.”

“If you say that again, I will melt you with my ‘Void’ magic. I swear, I will melt you.”

Derflinger shook uncontrollably with laughter. Eyeing it with great distaste,

Louise asked Derflinger.

“Hey, I guess there’s no one else to ask but you. A fine noble like me, is asking a rusty sword like you a question, be grateful.”

“What?”

Louise gave a slight cough. With a blushing face, she asked Derflinger in a tone of voice that desperately tried to savour any dignity she had.

“State in which areas that maid is more attractive than me, in a concise and easily understandable way.”

“What use is it asking?”

“That’s none of your business. Just answer the question.”

“Jealousy.”

“I said that wasn’t it didn’t I?!”

“And you even passionately kissed me back then… I’ll cry you know.”

“Right, now to melt you.”

Louise firmly held her wand while muttering an incantation. Derflinger quickly answered in a panic. He couldn’t possibly withstand an explosion of magical light.

“O-Ok I understand! There’s no helping you is there?! Well firstly, that girl can cook.”

“I guess so. But so what. You can just order food.”

“Guys like girls like that. She also seems to be good at sewing.”

“I can also do that. I was taught by my mother you know.”

“You are like a lizard, and she is a dragon if one were to compare you two in sewing.”

“Next.”

“Well, the face… I guess it’s a matter of preference. You’re quite good in this area but that girl also has her own charm. But that girl has a weapon you don’t have.”

“What would that be?”

“Breasts.”

“People grow you know.”

Louise said as she stuck out her chest. A magnificently flat chest.

“How old are you?”

“Sixteen.”

“Oh. Grown up already. No hope left.”

Louise started muttering an incantation.

“Wait! Stop! Hey! Guys naturally like girls with large breasts. He literally was off in fairyland when he had a bath with that girl.”

Derflinger said, as fury started to fill Louise’s eyes.

“What? What did you say just now?”

“Eh? When they bathed together…”

Derflinger explained the incident where Saito and Siesta took a bath together.

Louise had been deeply inhaling and exhaling. She was shaking uncontrollably with anger. Derflinger decided to keep quiet after being scared by her, something rare for a sword like him to feel.

Meanwhile the mole had popped its head up from the hole. It had seen the glad figure of its master who had been searching for it. Kneeling down, Guiche put his arms around his familiar and rubbed his cheek against it.

“Ah! I was looking for you Verdandi! You cute hairy thing! What on Halkeginia have you been doing, digging a hole here like this? Hm? Eh, Louise?”

Guiche looked perplexed as he peered in the hole to find Louise.

“Why are you in this hole?”

With a troubled expression, Verdandi looked at both Guiche and Louise. Guiche gave a slight nod and started to speak in a convinced manner.

“I understand Louise. You let Verdandi dig the hole, so that you could go looking for earthworms? In the mood for concocting beauty serums I see. And your familiar seems to be occupied with that maid from the dining hall as well…”

Guiche said, as he glanced over at the scene of Siesta nursing Saito. Just as usual, Saito was unconscious. Siesta was clinging to his chest and making a big fuss.

“Ahaha! You’ll have to work hard on your beauty to win back that familiar of yours! Being taken by a peasant girl…your honour will surely be ruined!”

"Crap." Derflinger muttered.

Louise grabbed onto Guiche’s ankles and pulled him into the hole. In a mere two seconds she finished him off. The mole worryingly prodded its nose against Guiche’s unconscious face. Clenching her fists, she muttered in a low voice.

“Next up is him.”

“Seems like this ‘zero' is a hundred times more scary than the previous ones.” Derflinger said to himself.

Rubbing his sore head, Saito returned back to Louise’s room to find Louise simply sitting cross-legged on the bed staring at the window.

The room was dim. It was already evening but Louise hadn’t turned any lights

on. Saito felt a slight shiver down his spine from the ominous atmosphere.

“Is anything wrong Louise? Isn’t the room a bit dark?”

Louise didn’t reply. She simply kept her back to Saito. She seemed to be in a bad mood. What could she be angry about? Saito wondered.

“Quite a late time to return isn’t it? What have you been doing?” Louise asked without moving an inch. Her tone of voice was cold, but it didn’t seem like she was angry. Saito gave a sigh of relief and replied.

“I met up with Siesta in the Vestri courtyard. She said she had something to give me. And then a rock from nowhere hit my head… it really hurt.”

“Really. Must have been divine punishment. By the way, I have something to say to you… so sit on the floor.”

“Eh, the floor?”

“You dog.”

"Ah, back to dog~", muttered Saito as he slowly backed towards the door. Don’t curse the gods, as they say. Heck, Louise was scarier than a god. Was it because of the Founder or the Void magic, he didn’t know, but it was Louise – who had annihilated all the enemy ships with a single spell.

Louise gave a flick of her wand when Saito tried to open the door.

"Huh?" When he tried to turn the knob it wouldn’t turn.

“Strange, huh… seems like I can do common magic with ease now.” Louise said with her back still turned towards him.

“L-Louise?” asked Saito in a trembling voice.

Louise was terrifying. Her voice was normal, but still, she was terrifying.

“I’ve always failed on the spells of the four major branches of magic up until now… perhaps I really am the one chosen to bear the void. And then day after day there’ll be growth. What do you think, dog?”

Saito was now desperately trying to turn the door knob, but it wouldn't budge.

"It's useless. I cast a 'Lock' spell on it. By the way dog, your master has been very uneasy. I might even be the one chosen to bear the void magic, but I can't even find anyone to talk over something with. No one knows that I can use void magic at the moment. It seems like my explosion spell has just been treated as a miracle by the people…. But I think the castle will know soon enough. Then what will become of me? In such a dire moment, my ungracious fool of a familiar decides to go on a date with a maid."

*And you even k-k-kissed me* – Louise was about to say before she quickly shut her mouth. Taking a deep breath she chose her next words.

Saito's face had grown pale already as he continued trying to turn the knob. No matter how hard he tried to turn it, the knob wouldn't turn. The 'Lock' spell was very strong.

"A date is alright I guess. But a bath. Now that won't do at all. That's the worst of the worst. Ignoring your master and taking a bath with a maid? I'm pretty sure that's enough for a death sentence. You're so lucky I'm a kind person."

Louise started trembling.

*You even k-k-k-k-kissed me. A bath. A bath with the maid.*

Something was flying towards the window. It was a pelican.

"Ah. That was quick."

Louise untied the package at the pelican's feet, placed it on the bed and put some gold coins in its beak. Seems like pelicans are used as the equivalent of home delivery services in this world.

"W-What did you buy?"

"I've come to realise that dogs just don't learn when you use a whip."

Saito's face stiffened as he madly tried to turn the door knob.

"H-Help! Help!"

“I told you, it’s useless.”

When he glanced backwards, Louise was standing right behind him. Saito gave a scream at the sight of her face.

Louise was biting her lip with her eyes lit up. She was probably even scarier than Siesta’s father.

Just as usual, Louise aimed a kick at Saito’s nether region, which resulted in Saito collapsing on the floor.

“Aaaaaah… W-Why are you so inhuman to my sensitive parts?”

Louise pressed a foot down on to Saito’s neck.

“Listen up dog. It seems like what you’re lacking is dignity. Always wagging your tail here and there – which is why I’ve bought this.”

Louise started to tie something that seemed like leather ropes on his body. And with a clink, the lock on his chest was locked. It was some kind of body suspender.

“W-What’s this?”

“A magical restraining device used to tame wild creatures.”

"You have to be joking me!" Saito cried as he tried to stand up. Louise muttered a short incantation.

“Vasra.”

With a gasp of pain, Saito fell down onto the ground.

“It’s got water and wind spells on it. At the master’s signal, it will start giving out electric shocks.” Explained Louise, but Saito was already unconscious from the shock.

Louise dragged his body across the floor and tossed him into his haystack.

“You’re a hundred years too early to bathe with a girl!”

# Chapter Two: Saito Goes Shopping in the Triumphant Town

Wardes woke up. He tried to get up and frowned. Wondering, he looked at the bandage that was rolled up around his body.

*Where am I? I am sure I was hit by the magic from the flying machine that Gandálfr piloted and lost consciousness.*

He looked around. It was a plain room with a wooden floor and walls, a bed and one desk. There was a pendant on the desk, which he used to wear around his neck. Seeing a pitcher, he reached out for it. But he could not reach it, as his body still ached all over. At that moment, the door opened up and he saw a familiar face.

“Oh, you've regained consciousness.”

“Crumbling Dirt? You...”

Fouquet placed the plate of soup on the desk. Wardes tried to get up again and felt a jolt of pain throughout his body.

“Tch..”

“You still cannot move. Your body has been pierced by bullets in numerous places. It took all the water element mages casting the ‘Recovery’ spell for three days and three nights to heal you.”

“Bullets?”

Wardes made a suspicious face.

“Was I shot by a 'Gun'? Is this the power of a ‘Gun’?”

A gun is a weapon that commoners use. The pressure of the gunpowder, ignited by the spark of the flint, pushes a round bullet out of the weapon. Although its power in short distance is superior to the bow's, the need to load the bullet and gunpowder separately makes it hard to fire quickly. In addition, the hit accuracy is not better than a bow’s either. A gun’s great advantage is that you don’t need any additional practice to use it. It isn’t a great weapon for a mage.

“Really? You didn’t even know the weapon that defeated you? What a careless man.”

Saying so, Fouquet scooped soup with the spoon and carried it to Wardes's mouth.

Wardes thought, *It must be that strange flying machine that Gandálfr used…*

Not only could it fly very quickly, but it also was equipped with a 'Gun' that could fire in rapid succession.

And then, in that instant, a whirlpool of light appeared...

Albion's entire fleet had been destroyed in a moment by that light…

*What was the light that I saw?*

*Something must have happened in Halkeginia.*

*I could take advantage of the change, because this event might be connected in some way with* ***that****...*

*My desire to get Louise’s abilities.*

*And Sacred Emperor Cromwell's manipulation of strange magic…*

Even if he was going to follow Cromwell and go to the Holy Land, his plan might not work out, remembering that the whole fleet was destroyed by just one person.

“Hey, the soup's getting cold.”

Fouquet, in an exasperated tone, said to Wardes. He was lost in his own

thoughts.

“Where is this place?” Wardes inquired, not giving the soup a glance.

“Albion. This is a temple located on the outskirt of Londinium, in which I had been in service in the past. Good thing you were able to return in one piece, you have to thank me for that.”

“Albion? What happened to the military invasion?

“Aah, I guess you didn't know the circumstances because you were out. It was a complete failure. After the airship fleet's annihilation, Albion’s army was routed. Geez, ‘Sure Victory’ my ass. If you couldn't defeat Tristain, whose numbers you vastly overpowered, you'll probably have a hard time recapturing the Holy Land.”

“I didn't know you joined the invasion troops as well. You should have told me about it.”

Fouquet was amazed.

“I actually informed you! I was dispatched there as a scout unit because Albion's army was unfamiliar with the foreign country's geography! It seems you are the type that forget things which don't interest you!”

“Is that so? Aah, that’s right. Sorry.”

Then Wardes muttered “I'm hungry, give me some soup,”

Although Fouquet made an ugly and unpleasant face, the soup was still carried to Wardes's mouth.

“Is 'hungry' all you can say? I hurriedly nursed you after seeing you fall, immediately treating you with my ‘Water’ spell. After that, using my illegal connections as a thief, I somehow got on the ship leaving to Albion, and escaped safely. Really, I shouldn’t have saved such an ungrateful person!"

Wardes pointed at the table.

“Can you bring that pendant to me?”

The pendant was a silver locket. Fouquet brought the pendant to Wardes. He took it and he put it on his neck.

“Is it very important to you?”

“Not exactly, but it calms me down.”

“She's a very beautiful woman.”

When Fouquet watched Wardes with a smile on her face, Wardes' cheeks became tingled with red.

“You saw it?”

“Yes, by impulse. You were holding to it tightly in your sleep, so it made me curious.”

“As expected from a thief.”

“So tell me, who is that person? Your significant other?”

Fouquet asked Wardes while bending herself forward. Wardes said in an unpleasant voice,

“She's my mother.”

“Your mother? Your looks deceived me, I didn't know you had a mother complex. Do you live with her?”

“Not anymore. Either way, it is none of your business.”

“After nursing you, that's the attitude you return?”

At that moment, the door opened with a clank. It was Cromwell, accompanied by Sheffield.

Seeing Wardes, he smiled thinly. *That smile never changes. Just like a doll*, Wardes thought.

They just experienced defeat. An unthinkable stumble at the first step of Albion's ambition. Yet the fact didn't seem to unnerve Cromwell. He was either a truly

strong man or a carefree optimist. It was hard to tell.

“Looks like you regained consciousness, Viscount.”

“I beseech your forgiveness, Your Excellency. I failed you not once, but twice.”

“But it seemed your failure was immaterial.”

Sheffield, who was standing by Cromwell's side, nodded, then read the parchment scroll that seemed to be the report, and muttered,

“A sphere of light appeared in the sky and blew off our fleet.”

“In other words, the enemy used an unknown magic against us. This was a miscalculation and it's no one's fault. If there was anyone to blame… it was our leadership's fault for not properly analyzing the enemy’s war potential. A mere soldier like you should not be blamed for that. You should just focus on recovering your health."

Cromwell offered his hand to Wardes. Wardes kissed it.

“I thank your Excellency’s kindness”

Wardes remembered Louise’s long, pinkish blond hair. Louise was in that flying machine. Such magic never…

Wardes saw through Louise’s talent. He wanted to have it in his own hands.

…The element that Founder Brimir used. The lost element, ‘Void’.

He shook his head. Cromwell said that ‘Void’ is an element controlling life. But how can it create such a light that would defeat an entire fleet?

Even if it was really powerful magic, it was hard to imagine Louise having control over it.

“Was the ‘Void’ the source of that light? But the ‘Void’ that your Excellency talked about and that light seems to be completely different.”

“No one can say that they have a full knowledge about what ‘Void’ is. ‘Void’ is a great mystery.”

Sheffield stepped in.

“It is wrapped up on the other side of an ancient, dark history.”

“History hides many interesting things. Once, I happened to come across a book that named one of the Founder’s shields as Saint Aegis. It has a fairly small amount of information regarding ‘Void’.”

Cromwell spoke as if reciting a poem.

“Founder created the sun, to shine upon the ground.”

“Indeed. There was no light within that small sun.”

“Mystery upon the mystery, I feel ill. Awakening is also bad.<!> Is it so, Viscount?"

“It is as you say.”

“It is said that Tristain’s army was led by Henrietta. For what reason has an inexperienced princess fought? That princess made use of the ‘Founder’s Prayer Book’. Maybe she sniffed out the sleeping secret of the Royal Family.”

“What is the sleeping secret of the Royal Family?”

“The Royal Family of Albion, Royal Family of Tristain, and Royal Family of Gallia… were one branch in the beginning. And the Founder's secret was split between them. Isn’t that so, Miss Sheffield?”

Cromwell urged the woman at his side.

“It is as Your Excellency says. The treasure that was given to Albion’s royal family was the 'Ruby of the Wind'… However, where the Ruby of the Wind disappeared to is yet to be found. Since the investigation has not ended so far.”

Wardes watched the woman with a dubious feeling. Because her face was hidden by the deep robe, it was not possible to see her expression. Though one could think she was Cromwell's secretary… she didn’t give an impression of being just a secretary. No strong magic was sensed from her. However, because she was promoted here by Cromwell, she might have some special ability.

“Now, Henrietta, a worshiped ‘Holy Woman’, enthroned to a queen.” Cromwell muttered.

Sheffield said. “The ruler of the kingdom. The queen of the country will also get the Royal Families' secret.”

Cromwell smiled.

“Wales-san.”

Wales, who was revived by Cromwell, entered the room from the corridor.

“You called, Your Excellency?”

“I want to offer congratulations for your lover’s… the Holy Woman’s coronation. I want her to come to my castle of Londinium. However, the journey seems to be very tedious so keep her company to dispel the boredom.”

Wales muttered, “Certainly” in a monotone voice.

“Then, Wardes-san. Take care of yourself. I will leave it up to you to invite the ‘Holy Woman’ to the dinner party and ensure her safe arrival.”

Wardes bowed.

Cromwell and others left from the room. Fouquet muttered absent-mindedly.

“Disgusting man. Baiting one lover with their dead lover is not a way a noble should act.”

Fouquet added, though she herself hated nobles.

“That man is not a noble. Haven’t you heard? He was a mere bishop at first.”

Then Wardes snuffled loudly.

“What’s wrong?”

“I just cannot stay calm. If only the wound would be done healing… I could do my work instead of playing with corpses…”

After that, Wardes regrettably buried his face in his hands.

“Damn! I… Am I powerless? Hasn't the Holy Land slipped away again…”

Fouquet laughed with a smile, and placed her hand on Wardes's shoulder.

“You are a weak man… Yet, I knew that from the beginning.”

And then, Fouquet brought her face close to Wardes’s and placed her lips on his.

Slowly pulling her lips back, Fouquet muttered.

“Rest for now. I do not know what you are hiding… Yet once in a while you need to rest as well.”

In Tristain’s royal palace, Henrietta was waiting for her guest. Even though she was a queen, she never sat on the throne. She mostly did the king’s work.

After the coronation was finished and she became queen, the number of things to do in the domestic and foreign areas greatly increased. Some were demanding loans, some were asking it in a good nature, and Henrietta, from morning till night, was always meeting someone. And, because of the war, there were more guests than usual.

Because she was always straining to show her dignity, she became very tired. Even though Mazarini assisted, she had to come up with the answers herself. It was too late for Henrietta to revert back to being a princess.

However… for the new guest, she neither showed or made such expressions or attitude.

A refrained voice called outside the room, informing Henrietta about the guest's arrival.

Right after that, the door opened.

Louise stood there, reverentially bowing her head. Next to her, Saito’s figure

could be seen. Even now, a restraining device used to tame wild creatures was attached to his body.

“Louise, aah, Louise!”

Henrietta ran up and embraced Louise closely. Looking up, Louise muttered.

“Princess-sama… No, I have to call you Your Majesty now.”

“I don’t like it when you say it so formally. Louise Francoise. Aren’t you my beloved friend?”

“Then, I will call you princess-sama, as usual.”

“Please do it for me. Aah Louise, I didn’t want to be a queen. It is twice as boring. It is three times more straining. And ten times more worrisome.”

Henrietta muttered, looking bored.

After that, Louise became silent, waiting for Henrietta’s words. This morning, the messenger from Henrietta came to the Academy of Magic. They boarded the carriage that Henrietta prepared and came here.

*I guess I was called for a specific reason* thought Louise. *Is it about the ‘Void' spell? However, she seems hesitant to talk about that.*

Henrietta just looked into her eyes, not talking. Reluctantly, Louise said “I ought to give my congratulations on the victory”. Louise tried to find a harmless topic to talk about with Henrietta.

“This victory was all thanks to you, Louise.”

Louise watched Henrietta’s face with a startled expression.

“You can’t hide such a great secret from me, Louise.”

“B-but I didn't do anything…”

Louise still tried to pretend not to know.

Henrietta smiled and handed a report, written on parchment, to Louise. After

reading it, Louise sighed.

“You scouted even that?”

“Well, since it is the war results, it is better not to overlook anything.”

After that, Henrietta faced Saito who was left out up till now. On the way there, he heard from Louise that Henrietta became a queen, so he felt very nervous.

“For controlling the foreign country flight machine that destroyed the enemy’s dragon knight corps, I express my greatest gratitude.”

“No… it’s not like that.”

“You are the hero of this country. So now I am giving you a noble’s title… "

“That’s so wrong! Turning a dog into a noble!”

“Dog?”

“N-no… it doesn’t matter” Louise murmured with a blush.

“Then, I will grant you a peer’s title.”

When Henrietta said this, Saito muttered, ‘Haa’. Then he remembered Kirche's words a while ago. That in Tristain, if you are not a mage from birth then you cannot become a noble.

But, despite his thoughts about the peerage, he didn’t open his mouth. Either way, when returning to Japan, all the titles would lose their meaning.

“Great… a really great war outcome. Louise Francoise. The way the war ended is all thanks to you and your familiar. There has never been such a victory in the whole of Halkeginia’s history. By all means, Louise, you should be given a territory the size of a small country and a title of duchess for this. And your familiar awarded with a peer's title.”

"I d-don't need anything... this deed was my familiar‘s...“

Louise muttered hesitatingly.

“Weren‘t you the cause of that light, Louise? That light was called a miracle of the castle, yet I do not believe in miracles. The light came from the flying machine that you were flying in. Aren't you the cause of it?”

Henrietta intently watched Louise. It was impossible to hide anything this way.

And what about Saito? Even though he constantly pulled Louise’s shirt sleeve, trying to cut in with “By the way…”, she slowly began talking about the Founder’s Prayer Book. She could not consult about it with anyone else. It was too risky to do so.

Slowly… Louise talked to Henrietta.

She took Henrietta’s ‘Water Ruby', placed it on the pages of Founder’s Prayer Book and an ancient script appeared. When she read it out back then, she cast a spell of the light.

“The Founder's Prayer Book was written using the element of 'Void'. Is this true, Princess-sama?”

Henrietta stared over Louise’s shoulder.

“You knew, Louise? Founder Brimir gave rings to three children from three royal families to keep as a treasure. Tristain got the ‘Water Ruby’ and Founder’s Prayer Book, which are now both in your possession.”

“Err…”

“It has been handed down like this among the royal families. Royal families were the ones that inherited the Founder’s power."

“I am not from a royal Family.”

“What are you saying, Louise? The ancestor of Duke of La Vallière was the king’s illegitimate child. And you are the Duke’s child."

Louise was startled.

“You, too, have the Tristainian Royal Family's blood. And that is good enough.”

After that, Henrietta took Saito’s hand. Seeing the runes, she nodded.

"Is this the sign of 'Gandálfr'? The sign of the Familiar that Founder Brimir used for protection while casting spells?"

Saito nodded. Sir Osmond also said the same thing.

“Then… I am really a 'Void' user?”

“I think it really is so.”

Louise sighed.

“That’s why you understand that I cannot reward you that way, right, Louise?”

Saito, who didn't understand, asked why.

“Why?”

Henrietta answered with a clouded face.

"If I were to give the reward, Louise's secret services would be exposed in the daylight. That would be dangerous. Louise's power is too big. Even one country could not manage such power. If an enemy learned about Louise's secret, they would become frantic about it and would do anything to get it. I alone should be the enemy’s target.”

After that, Henrietta sighed.

“Enemies are not the only ones interested in 'Void'. Even inside the palace… those who know about that power, will always try to use it for their own purposes.”

Louise nodded with a scared look.

“Therefore, Louise, you should not talk to anyone about that power. Your secret is safe with me.”

Then Louise thought for a while…

And, in a slowly determined way, she opened her mouth.

“Don’t worry princess-sama. I want to dedicate my 'Void' to you.”

“No… it is all right. You must forget that power as soon as possible. And never use it again.”

“But… Princess-sama I want to help you with the powers I was granted!”

However, Henrietta shook her head.

“Mother said, great power drives people mad. Who could be sure that you, after gaining the power of ‘Void’, would not turn out the same way?”

Louise proudly lifted her face. It was the face of a person who had decided her mission. However, such a face was somewhat dangerous.

“I always wanted to dedicate my power and body to princess-sama and the mother country. I was taught so, I believed so, and I grew up with that. However, my magic always failed. As you know, I was nicknamed 'Zero'. Behind sneers and contempt, I was always shaken with regret.”

Louise clearly asserted.

“However, God gave such power to me. I, myself, believe in using this power. Still, if you say that Your Majesty will not need it, then it is necessary to return my wand to Your Majesty.”

Henrietta was touched by Louise’s speech.

“Louise, I understand. You are still… my best friend. From the times when you helped me on Ragdorian’s lake. You took the blame for me…”

“Princess-sama...”

Louise and Henrietta tightly embraced each other. Saito, who as always was left out, swung his head absentmindedly. *Louise is too eager to promise without thinking…* he thought, though he didn’t say that.

*Though it was nice to help Henrietta… but what about the travel to the east to find a way to return me home…*

By helping Henrietta, it seemed like they would not go there.

“After this, I will help Louise too.”

“Naturally, princess-sama.”

“Then I give the 'Founder's Prayer Book' to you. However Louise, promise me. Don’t tell anyone that you are a ‘Void’ user. And do not use it recklessly, either.”

“Certainly.”

“After this, you will become my court lady and will obey only me.”

Henrietta then took out a quill pen and smooth parchment. After that, she signed the document and put down the quill pen.

“Take this. This is my formal permission. With this, whether in the royal palace, or inside or outside the country, you will have supreme authority over everything, even over the police. If there is no freedom, one cannot work well.”

Louise reverently received the permission with an expression of gratitude. Henrietta's authorization. This meant that Louise was granted with the right to act in the queen’s name.

“If I face a problem that only you can solve, I will surely consult you. Officially, please act as a student of Academy of Magic like you have up to now. Since it is you, you will, without a doubt, do well.”

After that, Henrietta turned towards Saito. Having an idea, she fumbled within the pocket of her dress. When she took out some golden coins, Saito gasped audibly.

“I ask you to look after Louise…my important friend, kind Familiar-san.”

“T-that’s… I cannot take it.”

Saito looked amazed at the golden and silver coins in her hand.

“By all means, please accept it. Giving you this as a sign of “Chevalier” is the least what this powerless queen can do. You showed your loyalty to me and to the mother country. This should not be unrewarded.”

Henrietta said with sincere eyes.

When seeing such eyes… it becomes impossible to refuse. After accepting this, he could not refuse to help Louise, as it seems…

Because Saito was not from this world, he wasn't Henrietta's vassal either, but even if he didn't have to feel responsible,

Saito felt a strong sense of obligation either way.

*Aah, it might be fate*, he thought.

No, it was his personality rather than fate. When such a beautiful woman like Henrietta said 'please', he could not find it in his heart to refuse. *What a light-hearted fellow I am. Haa…*

He wasn't so welcomed in the Japan of his time.

*Anyway, I should search for the way to return home*, Saito thought, putting the golden coins into his pocket.

Saito and Louise went out of the royal palace in line.

"Really… you are too eager to give promises…"

"What do you mean?"

Louise stared up at Saito.

"Because you said that you will help princess-sama, but then it will be impossible to go east."

Saito said in a disappointed voice.

"Don't leave without permission. Everyone remains here, so stop asking."

Louise averted her face and started walking leaving Saito behind. Saito ran after

her panicking.

“How can you say that? Release me from this!”

Saito pointed at the restraining device used to tame wild creatures that was attached to his body.

“Do not argue!”

“If the familiar is acting on its own, it's the master's duty to put a chain on him.”

Louise answered nonchalantly.

Saito, trying to get attention, suddenly gripped Louise’s shoulder.

They were in Bourdonne's Street already, right in front of the Royal Palace. The Main Street. And what about passers-by? They were all staring.

“Hey! People are looking! Let go!”

Saito said in a lowered voice.

“You…are you thinking that I should not return?”

Louise went ‘Huu!’ at these words and changed her expression.

“So that’s it, isn’t it? You are worried about me leaving, right? It would be hard to help princess-sama otherwise.”

*It's not like that,* Louise wanted to say, but shut her mouth. *That’s not the reason why I don't want Saito to return to his former world*. However, by saying this, she would reveal her hazy feelings for Saito. Louise's pride couldn't permit such a thing.

In that sort of division, Louise nodded reluctantly.

“T-that’s right! No one would worry for a familiar like you otherwise!”

“Lovely. So that’s how it is.”

Saito muttered, and began walking again.

What he really thought was, she didn’t have to say ‘because I love you’, but she could have said ‘I would be lonely’ or at least ‘I want you to be near’, if she would have said that, he would not have minded helping her and would have searched for the way to return later.

When Henrietta asked for his help a while ago, though he thought it was bothersome, he was also glad for a moment. No one really needed him in Japan. The earth kept on spinning, even with Saito gone. However, it was different in this world. Siesta and Henrietta… there were some people that needed him.

Yet he wanted to feel needed by Louise more. However, judging from her words earlier, all that she cared about were his ‘Gandálfr’ powers.

Saito pouted. He was sulky.

Determined, he started to push his way through the crowd. The town was still crowded from the victory celebration. A drunken group was yelling out toasts while hanging out their cups filled with wine.

Louise, still in shock from Saito’s ‘Lovely’, was petrified for a while. With face down, she bit her lower lip. When she looked up after a while, Saito was already gone in the crowd and could not be seen. Louise ran out panicking.

“Mooove!”

Louise bumped hard into a man. A man, who looked like a mercenary, collapsed. In his hand he had a bottle of sake, which he was gulping down vigorously. He seemed to be completely drunk.

Though Louise tried to pass that man sideways, he grasped her hand.

“Wait, Miss. You ought to apologize for bumping into a person in the middle of the street.”

Then another man, who seemed to be a mercenary, noticed Louise’s mantle and muttered “A noble, huh?”

However, the man who was clasping Louise's arm didn't move.

“Today is the festival celebrating the victory at Tarbes. Put aside the rank. Today

nobles, mercenaries and salesmen are equal. Hey, Miss Noble, how about sharing one drink with me as an apology for bumping into me?”

Saying so, the man thrust out his jar of wine.

“Let me go! You brute!"

Louise shouted. The man's face became brutally distorted at once.

“What did you call me. Hey! Who do you think attacked Albion's army in Tarbes! ‘Holy Woman’ or nobles like you, no, us – soldiers!”

The man reached out to grasp Louise's hair. However, his hand was stopped.

Saito, who showed up right before their eyes, firmly gripped the man’s hand.

“What? Go away kid!”

“Let go.”

Saito said in a quiet voice. If it were the old days… his legs would be shaking while threatening such a scary looking man. However, now it was Saito who had gone through many battles. Thus he had gained courage. Now he only had to grip Derflinger who hung on his back when the time came. Not pulling it out, just grasping it would be enough to knock all those soldiers out.

The man looked at the sword on Saito’s shoulder, with a similar look. The experience that he had gained through battlefields in many years told him that Saito’s attitude wasn’t just a bluff. Then the man spat nonchalantly and, urging his companions, left.

Saito silently took Louise's hand. And began to walk.

Louise tried to say something to Saito. However, being all flustered, she could not find the words. Saito walked rapidly, pushing through the crowd.

"Are you angry?" Louise asked in a small voice.

“Not really,” Saito answered snappishly.

The clasp of his hand made Louise flurried for a moment. *Does Saito feel the*

*same?* However, because Saito walked straight ahead, she couldn't see his facial expression.

Louise followed while being dragged.

It was chilly just as much as a pleasant feeling that Louise could not understand or explain.

Louise, while walking and holding hands with Saito, cheered up. The town was filled with colorful festivals, joyful shows, food carts and stalls where unusual goods were sold were stretched all the way down the street.

Being a local lord's daughter, Louise never walked in such a lively town this way. More so, she never walked in a town holding hands with someone of the opposite sex. Those two things combined, made Louise's head light and dizzy.

"So very noisy," Saito said.

"True," Louise muttered happily.

"Feels like my world's festivals."

"Really?"

"Yeah. The showy street stalls line up just like this… gold fish catching, yo-yo fishing, okonomiyaki shops, and food carts queuing in line…"

While saying so, Saito's eyes turned distant. Louise tightened her grasp on Saito's hand. Somehow, the thought about Saito suddenly leaving to some place made her feel bad.

*Sometime… the day when Saito leaves, will surely come.*

However, when walking together this way, the one that I want you to see is me, *Louise thought.* Just for now. And nothing else matters.

And at the same time she was angry at herself for thinking that way.

Because of love? That’s not it. It was her pride that was the problem.

After convincing herself of that, Louise looked around blankly.

And then, shouting “Waa”, stopped still.

“What is it?”

Saito turned around. Louise was looking at a jewelry shop. There, on a cloth, various rings and necklaces were displayed.

“Do you want to take a look?” Saito asked, and Louise, with a blush on her cheeks, nodded.

Seeing two people approaching, a merchant with a turban on the head rubbed his hands together.

“My! Please come in! I see you are a noble miss. We have rare goods to offer. This is made from “Wrought gold” and it is not a sham.”

The presented jewels were suited for nobles to wear; beautifully ornamented to satisfy the most various tastes.

Louise took a pendant. It was a pure-white pendant, carved in a shape of a shell. There were a lot of big jewels placed around. However, upon closer look, the jewels were nothing but cheap crystals.

Still, Louise liked this shiny pendant. Within the atmosphere of noisy festival, filled with quality goods, such a showy one attracted attention.

“Do you want it?”

Louise shook her head embarrassed.

“Don’t have the money.”

“Well then, I will cheapen it. It will be only four écus."

The merchant sweetly smiled.

“Too expensive!”

Louise shouted.

“You don’t have that much?”

Saito asked amazed, Louise puffed her lips nonchalantly.

“I would if I hadn’t bought that impertinent sword the other day. I spent all my month’s pocket money on that.”

Saito reluctantly fumbled in his pocket. He tightly gripped the golden coins that he got from Henrietta a little while ago. Holding the golden coins that were approximately of the size of one yen coin on his palm, Saito asked.

“How much is this worth?”

The merchant was surprised that it was Saito who was carrying money.

“T-this is! Hii, fuu, hmm…This is splendid.”

Taking up four gold coins on which an old king’s portrait was carved, the merchant passed the pendant to Louise.

Louise was taken aback with surprise, her cheeks unintentionally loosened up a bit. *The first thing that Saito did with the money given by Henrietta was shopping for me*. She was very happy. After it was in her hand for a while, she cheerfully put it on her neck. "It suits you well", said the merchant gracefully.

*I want Saito to have a look*, she thought while pulling his sleeve. However Saito, whose attention was on the stall near the sides, didn’t move. *What on earth is he staring at?*

Saito was gazing at the loot, taken from the Albion army, displayed on the ground.

Things that soldiers captured were taken to merchants.

They were articles taken from the enemy… swords, armor, clothes and clocks. Saito took one of the clothes.

*I want him to look at me*, Louise pouted lips sulkily. However, Saito’s full

attention was on the clothing. It was not unreasonable to want new clothes after all.

“What, you want clothes? But it is not a good idea to wear second-handed middle aged clothes that the enemy used to wear, there are much better ones.”

However, Saito didn't answer. He reached out for one piece of clothing, his hands shaking.

“Dear customer, you have an excellent eye. This is a seaman uniform from Albion. Though it is cheaply made, it is also convenient. Turning a collar this way up, protects neck from the wind.”

Seaman uniform? Indeed!

B-but in Saito’s world it was called a sailor uniform…

Saito’s head started working at full power.

Though the size was too big, it could still be modified for Siesta to wear…

He imagined Siesta wearing this.

It looked good.

The enjoyment increased. No, that’s not it. Not personal enjoyment. Gratitude. It was gratitude for the muffler! He still felt slightly guilty though.

That’s right, Saito cooled down. Money, he should absolutely use it for this.

“How much?” Saito asked in a voice overcome with emotion.

“Three for one écus would be fine.”

Louise was amazed. Paying such money for second-handed clothing was too much.

However, Saito paid the asked price.

Louise, who returned back to her room, was lying on the bed, listing the Founder's Prayer Book while humming. It seemed like she was in a good mood. Saito tried to slip out of the room quietly, he wanted to go to Siesta to deliver the goods he bought today, but the door was locked by Louise who waved her wand and put the 'Lock' spell on it.

“Are you going somewhere in the middle of the night?”

“Eh? No…”

Surely he could not say that he was going to Siesta’s place to deliver the sailor uniform that he bought today.

“J-just wanted to take some night’s air! Wah! Wahhahha!”

Louise scowled at Saito. Then, determined, she walked up to Saito and started eagerly taking his parka off.

“Wh-what are you?!”

“Taking it off.”

“Take it off? The Wild Creature's restraining device is in the way!"

When Saito shouted so, Louise removed the lock of the restraining device, looking down for a moment. Because he bought a pendant in town today, he thought she had forgiven him. Yet she could not forgive him taking a bath together with a girl so easily.

Louise unfastened the restraining device and took off Saito’s parka. Her face was always angry. She chewed her lower lip hard.

Then Louise went back to bed, hugging the taken off parka tightly and said “Face that way”.

With all her clothes taken off, Louise, wearing only Saito’s parka, pouted.

“Still want to go for a walk?”

*Giving it to Siesta will have to wait for tomorrow night*, Saito thought, now wearing only a T-shirt. Even though it was an early summer, the climate in Halkeginia was very different from Japan. Walking this way, he would catch a cold. Without a doubt, Louise knew that too.

“There are more important things than the night wind, don’t you agree~? And a partner who doesn’t serve his master is no good, don’t you agree~?”

Louise said, while lying down on her stomach and swinging her feet.

Reluctantly, Saito sat on the bed.

“Understood.”

Louise, lying down on the bed, began to read the Founder's Prayer Book.

“Isn’t it all blank?”

“I can read it.”

Louise showed “The Ruby of Water” on her finger to Saito and explained its relation to the Founder’s Prayer Book.

“Hee, Element of Void…”

Saito remembered the magical light, which blew off the fleet that day.

‘Void’. The legendary element that Founder Brimir used…

And, I am a Familiar that Founder Brimir is said to have used - 'Gandálfr'.

The legendary Familiar that has the ability to master all kinds of weapons, in order to protect the Founder, while he casts his spells…

“Then you are the strongest wizard in this world? Cool! Destroying with one swing.”

“I wouldn’t say so. I haven’t said this to princess-sama since I didn’t want to disappoint her…”

With a sigh Louise took the wand.

“Wh-what?”

After that, Louise slowly began uttering an incantation.

“Eor Sun Fuir…”

“S-stop! Idiot!”

It would be terrible if such explosion were to happen in a place like this. However, Louise didn't stop chanting.

“Yarunsakusa..”

Finishing the chant uninterrupted. Louise lifted the wand. Saito dug himself into his pile of hay, scattering the straw all around.

And then Louise’s eyes rolled back and she crumbled to the bed suddenly.

“L-L-L-Louise? Louise!”

Saito shook Louise in panic. After being shaken for a while, Louise opened her eyes.

“Auuu…”

“Wh-what? What’s wrong?!”

Shaking her head Louise got up abruptly.

“Stop making such a fuss. I only fainted for a moment.”

“Eh? Eeeh?!”

“Been chanting 'Explosion' till the last minute, but nothing… After that time, no matter how much I chant, I faint in the middle of it. The explosion only happened once.”

“What kind of thing?”

“I think the reason may be that the willpower is insufficient.”

“Willpower?”

“Right. Willpower is consumed when the magic is chanted. Didn’t you know?”

“How could I know such a thing?”

Then, Louise sat up straight demurely, lifted a finger and started explaining, proud as a peacock.

“Listen, the number of elements that a mage uses can be increased, and his class changes accordingly. A mage who can use only one element is a dot. Ability to have two – makes one a line. Being able to use three - triangle. Spells are also applied to the class. The spells from three elements are called 'Triangle spells'. Each time the spell class rises, the consumption of willpower doubles.”

“Haa.”

“For instance, the line spell would cost the mage eight willpower, but when that mage decides to use the dot spell, only four of his willpower will be consumed. The cost depends on each person individually, however the same rule applies to all. “

“Haa.”

“The main point is, that mage could cast two ‘Dot’ spells instead. Eight divided by four is two. Therefore, you could cast the spell twice. But when you cast a line spell only once, because twice of the willpower consumed, and eight divided by eight is one.”

“Haa.”

“When the line mage grows up to a triangular mage, consumption of the willpower spent on dot spells decreases by half. Therefore, four divided by two - two, he can use the dot spell four times. The line spell can be used twice. Triangular spell – one time. That’s because the mage grows up.”

“Haa. In other words, the low class spells can be chanted many times, while the high class spells can be chanted only so many times.”

“Right. So now you understand the relation between spells and willpower?”

“Somehow. Then, you fainting a little while ago…”

“Yeah. I fainted a while ago because I overworked and used up my willpower. The spell was too strong and my willpower was insufficient.”

“Then, why were you able to cast it the other day?”

“Well… Really why… I wonder myself…”

“How does willpower recover?”

“Basically, it recovers while sleeping.”

Saito thought while folding his arms together.

“Ummm… Well, up till now, you haven’t used many spells correctly?"

“Well, yes.”

“Therefore you collected a lot of willpower, right? And that time you used it all up at once.”

Louise made a startled face.

“For instance, let's assume that your willpower is 100. The ‘Explosion', consumed all 100 at once. While usually the willpower is recovered while sleeping at night, the amount needed is too large for you… Since it is as much as 100, you cannot store that much just with one night of sleep.”

Saito plainly stated his hypothesis.

“What? To me it seems that it might be the end of your magic.”

However, Louise's face was serious.

“It might be so..”

“Eh? Eeeh?”

“Applying the Earth magic Square Class spell ‘Wrought Gold’, gold can be created. But do you know why the world still uses money?”

“Eh?”

“It is said the square mages simply cannot chant the square spells many times. It’s too unreliable, one time the recovery might take one week, the other – one month. Besides, the amount of gold you could convert this way is too little. Therefore money is used instead of gold.”

“Hmmm…”

“In other words, powerful spells use up more willpower and take more time to recover. For me, it might be so as well.”

“Then…when would you be able to chant again.....”

“Don’t know. I… One month or maybe one year…”

Louise pondered.

“Ten years.”

“Don’t say such scary thing.”

“But, it was successful.”

“Oh well. No one can understand ‘Void’ fully. Anyways, the incantation’s power was demonstrated. There are no other spells like this one.”

“It’s too little now. Uuu, my hay…” Saito said while watching the scattered around pieces of straws.

“Isn’t it all right? Even if there is no pile of hay.”

Louise muttered, blushing for some reason.

"Haa", Saito held his breath once he noticed something. What! He became crazy from the view that Louise gave him, not aware of it herself. The parka’s hem had rolled up to Louise’s buttocks. *Just a little more, mooore*, he peeked.

Saito instinctively held his nose. Due to Saito’s gesture, Louise finally became aware that the parka rolled up. Instantly she sprang to her feet and held down the Parka’s hem while blushing.

“Na! You saw! You saw, you saw! You saaaaaw!”

“I-it’s your fault for not wearing panties!” Saito shouted as well.

“I cannot sleep with them! It was always that way!”

“Always, huh?!”

Then Louise bit her lower lip and, with some rustling, slipped under the futon.

“Sleep.”

Saito reluctantly slipped behind the blanket’s edge. He heard the voice of a sulky Louise within the futon.

“Sleep in the pile of hay, peeping familiar.”

“It was scattered.”

Though he heard Louise groaning a few times within the futon, she calmed down after a while. "Aah", thinking about the sailor uniform that he will deliver to Siesta tomorrow night, Saito fell asleep.

# Chapter Three: The Sailor Outfit and Louise's Jealousy

As the sunlight shone radiantly at Austri's Plaza, Saito was groveling on the ground and trembling violently. Then, raising his face, he gazed at the work of art he had produced, and once again started to go mad from his excitement.

"Hah, hah, hah..." His breathing became hot.

The throbbing of his heart reached its climax many times and brought Saito's heart to utopia.

Saito muttered quietly.

"Shiver, my palpitation's beat."

"Throb, my heart of homesickness."

"Shiver more and more heatedly, bless my genius....."

"The angel said. Said it here. I'm glad I'm alive....."

Saito tightly grasped the grass growing from the ground and yelled loudly.

"UooooooooooOOOOOOH! I'm, THE GREAAAAATESTT!"

Then he pointed at the angel in front of his eyes.

"Siesta is also the greaaaTTTESStt!!"

Siesta, dumbfounded, was staring at Saito's whole act of agony and excitement.

*Saito-san... is strange.....*

She murmured unintentionally. That was exactly just how abnormal Saito was acting.

"B-but, these clothes....."

"Wh-what? Something wrong? Is there something flawed?!"

Saito sprung energetically towards her.

"W, well... I mean, this is a military uniform, right? Even if I wear this, it won't look good..."

"Don't say such stupid things!"

Saito's intimidating attitude caused Siesta to go "Hii..." and back off.

"In thiiiIISS! W-W-World! That is certainly an outfit for the naval soldiers! BuuuUUUUT! In my woorrlLLD! Girls your age wear that and go to school! GoooOOOIIIING in present progressive form!

"Y-Yes..."

*Aah, Saito-san is surpassing strange...*

Then Saito screamed while half-crying.

"It is called sailor uniform in my world! I'm shorrRRYYY for being born!"

Siesta thought *So that is what this was about...*

*This is an outfit from Saito-san's birthplace...*

Last night, Saito came to her and handed her the sailor uniform with a stiffened expression. When Saito said "I'll modify this outfit for you to wear", she honestly thought that he had lost his mind.

Even so, Siesta honestly felt happy that Saito bought clothes for her.

And now, to Saito who was delighting over having her dress in his birthplace's outfit, she felt darling.

If Saito was normal right now, pulling away from him would be the only thing possible to do, but for that reason, Siesta blushed.

"At first, I thought Saito-san went crazy, but he had such a reason....."

*I understand!* Siesta nodded, and turned around to face Saito seriously.

"What should I do to please you even more?"

Saito, once again, looked at Siesta's appearance from the top to bottom.

First, the upper half. It was a beautiful gem made from Albion's sailor suits. White long sleeves with black cuffs. The collar and scarf were deep blue in color. Three white lines ran across the collar.

And then, Saito condensed his genius into "length". Saito, to his utmost ability, instructed Siesta to make the waist area short. By shortening the length of the upper half, it only reached to the top of the skirt. Therefore, whenever Siesta twisted her body, he could see her belly button. Saito was the real thing.

Now, the skirt. He shouldn't have done it, but he stole Louise's alternate uniform. It had a pleat on it, so he put it to practical use. This, as well, was shortened to the best he could. As a result, most likely the first skirt in this other world to be fifteen centimeters above the knees was created.

And then the socks. Those were the result from a clash between Saito's preferences and reality. Saito carefully chose and arranged deep blue socks.

Shoes. They were the high-laced boots Siesta always wore. It was the only scratch in this glittering work of art. He really wanted loafers here. But sadly, loafers did not exist in this world.

Anyways, these articles were all scrutinized and coordinated by Saito.

Her big breasts, usually covered and hidden by an apron, were raised up by the hand-made sailor uniform. Her slender legs, healthy like a serow's, were sucked into the fifteen-centimeter-above-knees skirt. Siesta usually didn't wear such short skirts, so the mix of nostalgia and freshness made him even more emotionally moved.

"Tell me! Saito-san! What should I do, to get closer to your birthplace?!"

Saito thought. Seriously, staking his life. He recalled all kinds of patterns. Like a high-powered calculator, Saito's head rotated.

The voice of his heart whispered.

*Saito, IT CAN ONLY BE THAT.*

*Right. It can only be that... Only that...*

With a almost-sobbing voice, he squeezed out

"Spin around."

"Eh?"

"Round and around, turn like that. Then, after that, say 'Sorry to keep you waiting!' cheerfully to me."

Siesta drew back. Saito was coinciding with the type of men her mother told her not to get close to when she was young. Still, Siesta wanted to please him.

As if to prepare herself, "Y-yes..." she nodded, and Siesta spun around. Her scarf and skirt lightly flew up into the air.

"So-sorry to keep you waiting."

"Wroooong!"

"Hii!"

"At the end, you raise a finger and go "ne". Cheerfully. One more time."

Nodding, Siesta repeated what she was told. Seeing this, Saito cried.

"Thank you for y-y, y, your bravery."

*Is this okay, Siesta? Is it really okay for this person?* She kind of felt that from the more composed part of her, but Siesta shut off that negativity.

*Every person has hobbies and preferences that they can't tell others. Saito-san is no exception. Yeah, that's all... Yes, that's it!* She told herself brightly and smiled. Siesta was strong.

"What should I do next?"

"Um, next is..."

When Saito folded his arms and started pondering over this, a group of two walked over to them in an awkward manner.

It was Guiche and the fat Malicorne. An unusual duo. It seemed the two had been staring at Siesta from some shelter.

"Ehem", Guiche coughed to grab attention.

"That is... what? What are those clothes?!"

For some reason, Guiche was furious while looking like he was going to cry. Malicorne, too, pointed to Siesta while trembling.

"O-o, o, outrageous! Absolutely outrageous! Isn't that right?! Guiche!"

"Aah, this! I've never seen such an outrageous outfit before! It-it-it!"

"It directly attacks the br-br-brain!"

The two's eyes glittered heatedly, and stared at Siesta as if to eat into her. *Waaan, the headaches multiplied,* Siesta felt miserable, but these two were nobles. Because she had to, Siesta forcibly smiled.

That smile and sailor uniform seemed to have completely damaged Malicorne and Guiche, since they started to draw near her in a staggering gait like a somnambulist's. Siesta, sensing danger to her body, said "Well, I'm going back to work!" and ran away.

"How lovely..." Guiche murmured in a dreaming tone as he watched her run off.

"Absolutely..." Malicorne also murmured, spellbound.

"What did you come here for?!"

When Saito yelled, the two finally came back to their senses. Then, Guiche embraced Saito's shoulders.

"H, hey, you. Where did you buy that outfit?"

"What do you plan to do by asking?"

Guiche said with an embarrassed smile

"Th-there is a person I want to give the outfit to as a present."

"The Princess?"

"Idiot! Too much! That's too much! Her Majesty the Princess is now Her Majesty the Queen! Aah, she has gone to a high place where I cannot reach... It was better when she was a princess, but now as the queen..."

*What high place? You never had a chance since the beginning.* Saito thought, but he decided to stay silent and listen.

"There, I finally remembered. That person who was always beside me, constantly looking at me with her lovely eyes... That beautiful blond hair. That sweet, perfume-like smile..."

*Ah, his ex-girlfriend.* Saito realized.

"Monmon?"

"Not Monmon! It's Montmorency!"

"I see. You want to be close to her again. You know, you really don't have any integrity."

"I don't want to be told by you. Now then, tell me. Where is that outfit sold?"

"Hmph. Like you could ever understand art."

Saito spat out. He didn't want someone like Guiche dishonoring his birthplace's memories.

"It can't be helped. I will not only report today's events, but also ask Louise as well."

Those were most certainly magic words.

"I still have two more. Use them as you please."

It pulled out Saito's maximum concession instantly.

"But still, just what is that outfit? I think I've seen that somewhere before... Don't sailors wear these clothes? For, hmm, a girl to wear it and give off such charms! How mysterious."

Folding his arms together, Saito puffed up his chest with pride.

"Of course. It has the charming magic from my birthplace cast on it."

Now then, on the night of that day.

Montmorency, prideful of her long, curly golden hair and vivid blue eyes, was mixing a potion in her room at the dormitory. Leaning her tall body on a chair, she was engrossed in mixing a secret potion inside a pot with a wooden pestle.

Montmorency the "Fragrance", a mage of the "water" element, had a hobby of magical medicine... potion making. And just like her second name suggested, her specialty was perfume making. The perfumes she made were known for the uniquely lovely fragrance they emitted, and she was extremely popular with the ladies and town girls.

Today, Montmorency was zealously creating a certain potion.

It was not just any potion. What a thing, how wrong that it was a forbidden potion. By the country's proclamation, it was an item forbidden to be created or used.

Montmorency sold the perfumes she made in the town and slowly saved up money. And then, today, this day, she used the money she saved up and obtained the recipe for the forbidden potion, as well as the high priced secret medicine needed for the mixing, at a dark magic store. Hobbies won over morals. Getting fed up over making normal potions, Montmorency felt like creating something forbidden despite knowing that an enormous fine would be imposed on her if she was discovered.

Along with the mashed up fragrant wood, dragon sulfur, and mandragora, at last, to pour in the essential secret medicine... the liquid that she had paid a large amount of money to obtain, she grabbed the small bottle beside her.

Just a small quantity... For just this little amount of liquid stored in the perfume bottle, Montmorency used up pretty much all of the money she had saved up. 700 in écu gold coins. An amount of money a commoner could use to live five to six years.

When she tilted the small bottle to the pot, being careful not to spill anything...

Someone knocked on the door, causing Montmorency to leap up.

"Wh-who is it... At a time like this..."

She placed the ingredients and utensils that were on the desk inside the drawer. After that, she headed towards the door while combing her hair upwards.

"Who is it?"

"It's me! Guiche! Your eternal servant! Open this door for me!"

*Whoisan eternal servant* , Montmorency muttered. She knew about his unfaithful nature quite well. When they walked together in the town, he would get distracted and look restlessly around at the beautiful women. When they drank wine at a bar, he would make advances at the waitresses whenever she left her seat for a bit. Finally, he would forget about a date promise and go pick flowers for a girl somewhere else. It was quite annoying to hear him say 'eternal'.

Montmorency spoke in an irritated voice.

"Why did you come here? I already broke up with you."

"I don't think like that at all. But if you think that way, then it is my fault... After all, see, I love beautiful things. In other words, I am a servant to beauty... Like you already know, art, that's right, art! I'm too weak against beautiful things..."

*You love art? For someone with bad tastes, you sure can say things.* She thought. The color of the shirt he wore for dates was gingira violet, and she got a headache the time he came wearing a red and green scarf.

"But I've made sure that I will no longer accept any art except you. After all, you seem to be the most art-like. Um, like your blond hair."

*Are you an idiot?*

"Go away. I am busy."

When Montmorency said that coldly, silence fell for a while. After that, Guiche breaking down and crying could be heard in the corridor.

"I understand... Being told like that, I can only perish on this spot. If I'm hated by you, who I love, so badly, then there is no worth at all in life."

"Do what you want."

*Men like Guiche couldn't die just because they get rejected.* Montmorency kept up her indifferent attitude.

"Now then, I want to, at least... on the door of the room you live in, I will carve

proof that I have lived... that I have loved you."

"Wh-what are you doing?! Stop that!"

The sound of something hard could be heard scratching on the door.

"The man who sacrificed himself for love, Guiche de Gramont. Destroyed by eternal love, he dies here... There."

"Not 'there'! Geez!"

Montmorency opened the door. Guiche was standing there with a full smile on his face.

"Montmorency! I love you! I really love you! I love you! I love you!"

And then, he embraced her tightly. Montmorency was enthralled for a moment. Anyways, Guiche continuously said "I love you". It was because of his lack of vocabulary, but no matter how many times he said that, she didn't feel bad.

Then, Guiche handed the bundle he was holding to Montmorency.

"...What is this?"

"Open it up. It is a present for you."

Montmorency opened up the bundle. It was the sailor uniform. Saito had asked Siesta to remake the uniform to fit Montmorency's body, Guiche always memorized the sizes of the girls he got along with.

"What a strange outfit..."

Montmorency raised her eyebrows.

"How about you wear it? It will definitely fit you. Your purity will be amplified manyfold. Come on. Hurry. What, I'm facing in another direction."

Facing backwards, Guiche started to bite his nails restlessly. Seeing the inevitable, Montmorency took off her shirt and put on the outer garment.

"I'm done."

Turning around, Guiche's face brightened energetically.

"Aah, Montmorency~... You really are pure... My cute Montmorency~..."

While muttering that, Guiche tried to kiss her. Right away, Montmorency obstructed him.

"Monmon..."

Guiche's face distorted sadly.

"Don't misunderstand. I opened the door to my room, but I didn't open this door. I haven't decided to make up with you yet. Also, who are you calling Monmon?"

With just that, Guiche was happy. There was still some hope left.

"My Montmorency~! You feel like considering it, I see!"

"If you understand, then leave! I was in the middle of something!"

Saying "Yes, yes, of course I'll leave. If you say so, I'll leave any time." Guiche left the room hopping.

Montmorency reflected herself in the mirror.

"What is this... There's no way I could wear something so embarrassingly short-lengthed!"

Unintentionally, her face reddened. Though looking carefully, this outfit was quite cute. Guiche had purposely prepared this outfit for her sake.

Umumumu...

Well, yeah, being told "I love you" like that, she was in a pretty good mood. They were going out originally, so she didn't hate him.

"What to do? Forgive him?"

But, she remembered the way Guiche cheated on her in the past.

*Even if I go out with him again, won't everything just repeat all over again.* She

was fed up with getting worried over his cheating.

*What should I do?* While she was thinking that, she remembered the potion she had been mixing. She opened the drawer. She saw the secret medicine inside the perfume bottle that she had hid a moment ago.

Montmorency tilted her head and started to ponder.

*Un, it is a good trade... I can also test for the effectiveness...*

*How about I use this potion a bit after it is completed,* Montmorency thought.

The next day, everyone's attention focused on Montmorency simultaneously when she entered the classroom. Why, she had appeared wearing the sailor uniform.

The male students reacted quickly to this.

Sailor outfit and girl... Feeling a fresh tidiness at this exquisite grouping that they'd never imagined before, they stared engrossed at Montmorency. In regards to the way the guys reacted, the female students quickly felt jealousy and envy, and they glared at her.

Montmorency managed to monopolize the glances of everyone in the class, so she was in a good mood. Putting her hand on her hip, she looked upwards and pridefully put on airs and headed to her seat. Louise was also staring at Montmorency while gaping. *If I'm right, isn't that the sailor outfit of the Albion army that Saito bought in town?*

Louise poked Saito, who was beside her and shivering for some reason.

"Hey, aren't those the clothes you bought? Why is Montmorency wearing it?"

"Ah, aah... Well, ehe, ah, Guiche told me to give it to him..."

Louise remembered that Guiche and Montmorency had been going out with each

other.

"Why did you give it to Guiche?" Saito started shivering even more.

"Eh? Because, he said he wanted it..."

Louise felt something suspicious from Saito's attitude.

"Heey, are you hiding something from me?" She glared ferociously at him.

"Eh? Eeeh? I'm not hiding anything! Come on now..."

Saito felt damp cold sweat streaming down him. He didn't think Montmorency would wear it to class.

*Crap, if Louise finds out it was a present for Siesta...*

*Louise would definitely get angry. It seems that this girl finds it boring when I, her familiar, get along with other girls. Even though she doesn't love me or anything, she can't forgive that.*

*Definitely, just like Louise always says, "Ignoring your master and getting along with other girls" irritates her.*

What the heck? Anyways, her desire was to monopolize her familiar, Saito interpreted. She was getting mad at him because her pet dog was more attached to others than her. Never in his wildest dreams did Saito think Louise harbored feelings for him. Very Saito-like, it was a considerably roundabout way to misunderstand.

*Aah, when she found out I took a bath with Siesta a while ago, it was horrible.* Resentfully, Saito looked at the restraints that were once again placed on him.

That incident... If Louise found out he had Siesta wear a sailor uniform and enjoyed the skirt spinning... His face stiffened in fear.

*Hung on the ceiling, and send electricity at him repeatedly...*

*In the end, taste an attack of "Void"...*

*Get scattered like that straw bundle...*

*I might die...*

Saito started shivering violently. *Don't shiver, it'll be suspicious!* The more he thought that, the more he shivered. *In the end, should I have just presented that sailor uniform to Louise in the first place? No, the high-prided Louise would never wear it. Besides, Siesta fits the sailor uniform better. Her hair is black, and she's one-eighth Japanese. Louise's pink-blond wouldn't fit the sailor uniform. Her body is small too, so it would get baggy.*

*What?*

*Th-that's it! Damn, that would be quite good too. Th-that would have been good too. Damn! Calculation error! What have I done.....?*

Saito shook his head to chase out those delusions. *Either way, all I wanted was to enjoy the atmosphere from my birthplace. There is nothing to feel guilty about. It's a lie, but not.*

His face was ghastly blue, he was violently shivering, and was muttering under his breath, so it wasn't just Louise that found him suspicious.

"Hey. What are you hiding? I won't forgive you if you hide something from me."

Louise's eyes hung up.

"I-I'm not hiding anything."

Too suspicious. Louise tried to question him again, but she had to give up when the teacher entered the classroom.

When school ended, Saito left an absolutely impossible reason of "I have to feed the pigeons" and disappeared out of the classroom.

"When did he get a pigeon?"

Louise muttered with a very grumpy face. For some reason, a really bad premonition could be felt.

Saito ran to the kitchen. He hadn't been able to talk to Siesta because she looked busy during lunch and Louise's surveillance was severe.

Seeing Saito, who was panting by the time he got there, Siesta's face shined happily.

"Waah! Saito-san!"

The head cook, old man Marteau, also came up to him and wrapped his thick arm around Saito's neck.

"Hey! Our sword! It's been a while!"

"He-hello..."

"Yai! Lately, you haven't been coming here! Siesta's always so lonely, you know!"

"Wahahaha" Came laughing voices throughout the kitchen. Becoming bright red in the face, Siesta, who had been washing stuff, grasped a plate tightly. Saito quickly drew his mouth near Siesta's ear.

"Siesta."

"Ye-yes..."

"About those clothes... When you're done with your job, could you bring them with you?"

"Eh?"

"Let's see... Someplace where no one will see us is good... In the Vestri plaza, there's a staircase leading up a tower, right? Bring them there."

Siesta blushed in amazement.

Afterwards, Saito jogged off and disappeared.

"Aah... I'm..."

"What's wrong, Siesta. A promise for a rendezvous?"

Hooting came flying, but they no longer entered Siesta's ears. Her face completely reddened, Siesta whispered absentmindedly.

"What should I do? Aah, I'm, going to be snatched away..."

Now then, on the other side, Louise was walking around the school and searching for her familiar.

Ever since he said he was going to feed his pigeon, Saito had not shown himself.

Getting to the tower of fire, she peeked inside Mister Colbert's laboratory. Even if you call it a laboratory, it's just a worn-out shack. Whenever Colbert had free time, he usually hung out in there.

But, Saito was not there. Colbert, by himself, was doing something noisily to the Dragon's Raiment that was left in front of his laboratory.

Louise asked Colbert.

"Mister Colbert, have you seen Saito?"

"I don't know... He hasn't come here for two or three days."

Louise looked at the Zero fighter and was astonished. The engine part of the nose had been removed from the body and placed on the ground, and it had been tragically disassembled.

"Oh, this! I just got interested in the structure. I didn't get permission from Saito-kun, but I lightly disassembled it. It's complicated, but theoretically speaking, it is not much different from the 'Joyful Snake-kun' I designed. Still, this is quite a fragile thing. If it flies once, it has to be precisely disassembled and have the parts looked over. Otherwise, not only will it fail to perform to its original efficiency, there is also a chance it will break..."

Colbert finally started talking about the engine's structure and maintenance.

"Ha, hah... Well then, pardon me."

Louise didn't really have interest in that conversation, so she bowed her head and started to run once again. Colbert shouted at her back.

"Miss! If you meet Saito-kun, tell him this! I have placed a surprising new weapon onto this 'Dragon's Raiment'!

The next place Louise visited was the tower of wind. In the magic academy, towers were arranged into a pentagram with the main tower in the center. The tower of wind was one of them. It was mostly only used for lessons. There was only one entrance.

Louise witnessed the suspicious shadow of a person disappearing through the door into the tower. Whitish clothing... a large collar.

Clearly, it was the sailor outfit worn by Montmorency just a while ago.

*Who is it? If it was Montmorency, then it would be blond hair... The person who entered a moment ago had black hair.* Louise secretly followed the person.

Opening the door to the tower of wind, she ran straight down the corridor that had semicircular rooms arranged to the left and right.

Slowly pushing the door open, she heard the sound of footsteps steadily climbing up the staircase.

After Louise held her breath on the first floor for a while, she pursued after the person. She heard the sound of a door opening and closing on the second floor.

To keep herself from making sounds from her footsteps, Louise cautiously came up to the door. There, Louise leaned her body closely to it. This should be the warehouse. Just what does the person wearing the white sailor outfit plan to do here?

Louise pushed back her pink-blond hair and placed her ear on the door. She heard a strange voice from inside. An intermittent one.....

"Haah, Nn, Haahaa..."

That kind of voice. Louise's eyebrows bent into a "". Because it was small, she could not figure out who it was.

But, it was a guy's.

At a place like this, calling out someone wearing those garments... A person who can make those voices...

Louise thought up a terrible delusion inside her mind.

"Haa! Cu-cu, cute..."

*Cute?* At that moment, something flipped inside Louise's head.

Baang! She opened the door and pounced into the room.

"What are you doing?!"

"Hiiiiii!"

The person there turned around. The person was wearing the sailor outfit, and what's more, was wearing a skirt below. Sure enough, it was the fat Malicorne.

"Ma-Ma, Malicorne?"

"Louise!" Malicorne tried to run and escape, but he wasn't used to the skirt, so his feet got tangled in it and he fell over.

"Ah! Nna! Ah! Fua! AAH!"

Malicorne shouted while writhing on the floor. With the look of an ogre, Louise trampled on Malicorne's back. In the warehouse was an old mirror. The "Liar's Mirror". It was a mirror that reflected ugly things beautifully and beautiful things unattractively, but for various reasons, it almost got broken, so it was shut here. It seemed Malicorne was finding self-satisfaction in reflecting himself in the mirror. What a preposterous pleasure.

"Why are you wearing that?"

"No, it was just too lovely... Bu-but, I don't have anyone to wear it for me..."

"So you wore it yourself?"

"Th-that's right! Is that wrong? I-I have to wear it myself! Guiche has Montmorency and your commoner of a familiar has that maid from the kitchen! But, I don't have a girlfriennnnnd!"

"What did you say? What about Saito and the maid?"

Louise's eyes went up.

"Eh? Well, he had the maid wear these clothes and spin around... Aah, it was moving! Just thinking back to it, my heart feels burnt from those lovely scenes! That's why I should at least reflect myself in this mirror wearing it as a memento of that memory... Aaah, I... I'm such a lovely fairy... AAAaaaaahh!"

Malicorne shouted. Louise trampled that face with her foot.

"Silence."

"Ah! Aah! Ah! Louise! Ah! Louise! Being stepped on by a beautiful girl like you... I feel like I'll lose my sense! Clear away my sins! Let me repent for it! Crush my sins of losing control over myself from acting like a lovely fairy in a place like this! There's something wrong with me! Ah! Ah! Nnnnaaaaaaaaa!"

Just like that, Louise trampled Malicorne's face and caused him to faint.

"Yeah, there is something wrong with you."

Louise muttered, her shoulders moving up and down from anger.

"I see... So that is what it was about... The maid is that good... So she's so good that you would give her a lovely outfit as a present... Plus, you had fun making her spin around and around? Don't joke with me."

Tightly squeezing her hands into fists, Louise growled.

"That familiar. Even though he kissed me."

At the corner of the appointed place, Vestri Plaza, Siesta came up to the staircase of the tower of fire after night had completely fallen. After her job ended, it took time to clean her body with a bath and finish dressing up.

She headed towards the landing of the staircase, but Saito was not there. There were only two barrels there. The surroundings were dim. Siesta worriedly looked around her.

"Saito-san..."

Discouragingly muttering that, the cover of a barrel opened up with a sound.

Siesta instinctively backed off, but Saito popped up from inside it.

"Siesta."

"Wah! Saito-san! Why are you there?!"

"Well, there were some circumstances... Wai-, eh?"

Saito looked at Siesta's appearance and his eyes widened. She was wearing that handmade sailor uniform.

"Y-you came wearing it?"

"Eh, yes... Because, I thought Saito-san would be happier if I wore this."

*Crap. I should have said return it, instead of bring it. There's no way I can tell her to take it off right here.* While Saito was panicking like that, Siesta spun around and raised a finger in front of her face.

The skirt lightly soared up.

"Un, um... Th-thanks for waiting."

Then Siesta smiled brightly. *C, cute.* Saito involuntarily blushed.

At that time, the sound of a barrel shaking behind them happened.

Siesta went "Kyaa!" and clung to Saito.

“Nyaa, nyaa” came the cry of a cat.

Saito stroked his chest in relief.

“Oh, just a cat...”

But, the problem wasn’t the cat. Siesta was pressing her breasts on him. They were squashed by Saito’s chest, and the handmade sailor uniform freely changed its shape.

Saito’s face paled. *Th-th-th, this sensation is.*

"S-Siesta, um..."

"What is it?"

"You aren't wearing a bra?"

Siesta looked blankly at him.

"What is a bra?"

"Eh? Eeeeehhh? You know, to the breasts, like this, protect it..."

But, Siesta still looked blankly at him. It seemed there were no bras in this world.

"I do wear drawers and a corset under my shirt when I am in my maid outfit though..."

Then she blushed.

"But, I am not wearing anything right now. Drawers would show if I wore it along with this short skirt..."

"What are drawers?"

"Eh? Um, undershorts."

*Aah, those things that look like expanded spats.*

*Haah, so her breasts are like this when she isn't wearing a corset.* Saito thought while looking up at the sky. He felt that he would get a nosebleed if he didn't do so.

*More importantly, there are no bras? I see. Now that I think about it, when I was washing Louise's underwear, I have memories of washing panties, chemise, and corsets, but no memories of bras. I thought it was because she didn't have breasts, but it seems bras themselves don't exist.*

*Also, while noble girls can wear laced underwear, it can't be the same way with commoner girls like Siesta, right? Eh? She isn't wearing anything right now?*

*Wh-which means.....*

"You're so mean, Saito-san... I do not possess any small laced underwear like the nobles do... Yet, you have me wear such a, such a short skirt..."

*In other words, she isn't wearing it.*

*INDEED!*

Inside his head, fanfare resounded like banbakabaanbanbonbanbanbakabaan.

*First place. Siesta-san, first place*

Siesta tightly leaned her body on Saito. Hugged his shoulders. Slowly, Siesta drew her lips closer to Saito's.

"U, um... Are, are we going to do it here?"

"Eh?"

"Well, yes, I am a village girl, so, um, I don't mind the location, but, um..."

"Siesta?"

"A more, um, cleaner place that people wouldn't go to would be better. Ah, but this is just a wish! So if Saito-san says this place is good, then I am fine too. Aah, I'm scared. After all, this is my first time. Mother, forgive me. I'm going to

finally be snatched away here."

It seemed she was really misunderstanding things. Saito only wanted her to return the sailor uniform here. But Siesta thought she was going to be snatched away.

The moment he thought that he needed to explain...

Behind them, the cover of the other barrel popped straight up.

"Wh, what?!"

When Saito turned around, the fallen barrel cover directly hit his head.

"Gyaa!"

Then from inside the barrel, a silhouette stood up as the ground shook thunderously. Actually, the only thing that shook was the barrel, but it felt like the actual ground was trembling. That was just how angry the person inside the barrel was.

"L-Louise?"

Saito muttered with a trembling voice. Siesta was frightened by Louise, whose head was poking out of the barrel, and hid in Saito's shadow.

"Wh-why are you inside a barrel...?"

"I was tailing you and saw you secretly hide inside a barrel, so I copied you and hid inside the barrel beside you. I was really careful to not make a sound. But, I hit the barrel in anger a bit. The 'nyaa, nyaa' part."

*Aah, that cat's cry was Louise. All of it, completely, she had heard our conversation just now.* Louise's face was pale with anger. Her eyes raised up, her whole body was trembling like an earthquake. With a completely trembling voice, Louise murmured.

"That's quite a wonderful pigeon you're raising, isn't it. Heeh. A lovely outfit as a present, huh. Fine. I am kind, so I'll forgive something like that. I don't really mind you ignoring your master and sending your pigeon presents."

"Louise, listen."

"But, that pigeon said this. 'You have me wear such a short skirt'. Without any underwear, 'you have me wear such a short skirt'. The best. That's the best joke this century."

"Louise! Listen! Please!"

"Relax. It won't hurt. With my "Void", I won't leave a speck of you left."

Setting up her "Founder's Prayer Book", Louise began to chant her spell. Sensing danger to his life, Saito instinctively grasped Derflinger hung on his back.

Siesta had become scared and hid herself in a shelter.

"What is with you? Are you planning to oppose your master? Isn't that interesting?"

Louise muttering that was scary. More than a battleship, more than a dragoon, more than an orc demon, more than Wardes... Louise was scarier than anything up to now.

Saito's body trembled stiffly.

*What's with this intensity...*

*I-i, is this "Void"...*

"Partner, give up."

Derflinger whispered in a bored manner. Demonstrating foolhardiness, Saito pulled out his sword.

"Vo-vo-vo-void isn't anything! Bring it on!"

The rune on Saito's left hand shone... Louise swung her wand down half-way though her chanting. Boom! And the area in front of Saito exploded.

Being swallowed by the flash, Saito was blown off the landing and struck the ground below.

After striking the ground, Saito's face distorted with fear, and he stood up and ran away. Louise peeked out from the landing and shouted.

"Wait!"

*Like I'd wait. If I wait, I'd die. Absolutely die.*

Primeval fear took over Saito's mind. Saito, while falling over, desperately ran.

Louise chased after him.

Guiche was trying his very best in Montmorency's room to woo his lover.

About how Montmorency's appearance was like a rose, like a wild rose, like a white rose, how her eyes were like blue roses, anyways, he used roses and complimented her, and then he extolled her by using the spirit of water as comparison.

Montmorency, being no exception among the Tristain nobles, was proud and conceited, so she did not hate flattery. However, her back was turned to Guiche, and she, acting, looked out the window wearily. It was the "Compliment me more" sign.

Seeing this, Guiche searched his head even more and unleashed words to attract her affection.

"In front of you, wouldn't the spirit of water run away? See, this hair... It is like a golden grassland. It's a sea of glittering stars. Aah, any female besides you can no longer enter my eye."

Guiche kept going in and out of the room, and he had already spat out enough lines to make a drama. *I guess this should be enough* Montmorency thought.

Slowly, still facing backwards, she gently held out her left hand to Guiche. "Aah" Guiche let out a moan of wonder and kissed that hand.

"Aah, my Montmorency~..."

Guiche tried to bring his lips near hers, but it was stopped by her finger.

"Before that, let us drink some wine. Since you went through the trouble of bringing it here."

"Of, of course!"

On the top of the table, a vase with flowers in it, a bottle of wine, and two ceramic glasses were placed.

Guiche had come to Montmorency's room carrying those in his hand.

Guiche hurriedly poured the wine into the glass. Doing so, Montmorency suddenly pointed out the window.

"Oh? A naked princess is flying in the sky."

"Eh? Where? Where, where?"

Guiche's eyes widened and stared outside the window as if to eat into it. *W-h-a-t i-s "any female besides you can no longer enter my eye", it seems that I have to use this.* While thinking that, Montmorency secretly poured the contents of the small bottle she had hidden in her sleeves into Guiche's wine cup. The transparent fluid dissolved into the wine.

Montmorency smiled sweetly.

"Just a lie. Well, let us toast."

"Come on now, don't startle me like that..." The moment Guiche said that, the door opened with a bam and a whirlwind flew in.

Guiche was sent flying and tumbled onto the floor. It was Saito.

"Haa, haa, haa... Hi-hi-hi"

"Why are you here?!"

"Hide me!"

While saying that, Saito jumped in Montmorency's bed.

"Hey! Is there anyone who would jump into Montmorency's bed! Leave! You!"

"Wait, what are you doing?! Entering someone's room as you please..."

When Montmorency crossed her arms and shouted at Saito, another whirlwind flew into the room. Montmorency was sent flying and struck her nose severely on the floor.

"Louise!"

Guiche yelled. Why, it was Louise who had lost herself in anger.

"Wh-wh-wh, what are you two doing?!"

"Shut up! Where's Saito!"

Being pressured by Louise's threatening attitude, Guiche and Montmorency exchanged glances and pointed at the bed. There was a thick bulge in the futon, shivering slightly.

In a low voice, Louise ordered towards the bed.

"Saito, come out."

A stiffened voice came out of the futon.

"Saito isn't here."

Louise picked up the wine glass from the table. Montmorency went "Ah!" in a quiet voice, but it was too late. Louise drank it all in one gulp.

"Buhah! I got thirsty from the running. Everything is all your fault. Fine, I'll be the one to go to you."

Louise pulled away the bed's futon.

Saito was there trembling.

"Prepare yourself... Nna?"

The moment she looked at him and said that, Louise's emotions changed.

Louise had chased Saito around because she couldn't forgive him for giving other girls presents despite having kissed her. If you kiss a girl like Louise, it is going to get troublesome.

In other words, it was a problem of pride.

But, the moment she saw Saito just now, her feelings toward Saito jumped straight up. Until then, well, she vaguely liked him. She wouldn't accept it herself, but she liked him. That was probably why she was so jealous...

In this moment, she loved with no hamper at all. That emotion was so big, even Louise herself was bewildered. Without thinking, Louise covered her cheeks with her hands.

*Oh my... I liked him this much?*

*I loved him this... this much?*

Tears overflowed from Louise's eyes.

Her feelings of sadness were bigger than her feelings of anger. She liked him so much, so why didn't Saito look at her. It was so sad, Louise started to sob.

"Louise?"

Saito suspiciously looked at Louise, whose attitude had completely reversed, and stood up. Guiche was also watching Louise, who had suddenly started crying, with a surprised look.

Montmorency was holding her head and going "Oh no". The drug she had intended Guiche to drink had been drunk by Louise.

"Hey, Louise..."

Louise looked up at Saito and clung to his chest.

"Idiot!"

"Eh?"

"Idiot, idiot! Why? Why?"

Louise started hitting Saito.

"Louise, you... Just what..."

Even though she was angry like fire up to now, her attitude was completely different. Saito panicked.

"Why won't you look at me! That's so mean! Uween!"

Louise buried her face in Saito's chest and wept.

# Chapter Four: Tabitha's Secret

A few hours before, in the late morning of the day Louise had been chasing Saito around.

Kirche and Tabitha sat in the horse drawn carriage. They had travelled from the southeast, from the magic academy. Kirche stretched her head out the window and gasped.

"Tabitha! Check it out! Cows! Cows! Look! There are a lot!"

The ranch was on both sides of the road and cows were grazing.

"They are grazing! Moo, Moomoo!"

However Tabitha didn't respond. She continued to read her book as usual. Feeling bored, Kirche stretched both her arms out.

"Hey, Tabitha. It is a long awaited return home from school, shouldn't you be more happy?"

Since Louise and Saito weren't here because they had been called to the royal palace, when she had come to Tabitha's room to play, she was shocked to find her packing her luggage.

"Are you going on a trip?" Kirche asked her.

Tabitha answered that she had to go back home to see her mother. Though Tabitha was reticent as always, Kirche felt something different in her voice. So Kirche and Tabitha took the trip together.

Because Tabitha's family sent a coach, they had no need to use her wind dragon. Instead, it circled above them in the sky during the trip carrying Kirche's Salamander on its back.

"Since the school had given us a formal approval for our leave, it won't be counted as an absence and we don't have to worry about having to clean the tower as punishment."

Tabitha continued to look at her book without answering. *I've been her friend for more than three years, and I still don't know what she is thinking.*

Kirche decided to try and spark a different conversation.

"This is the first time I learned that your motherland isn't Tristain, but Gallia. You are an exchange student?"

They were soon passing the border, Kirche had already asked Principal Osman to sign and issue papers allowing for her safe passage.

Kirche had a vague sense that Tabitha's name was a pseudonym... But she had never asked her about the origin of her name.

Tabitha. It was actually a quite common name. Even the commoners would use better names. It was the kind of name that could be given to cats.

She had always thought that Tabitha was perhaps hiding that she belonged to a distinguished aristocrat family of Tristain, but it appeared she was wrong, she actually belonged to the nobility of the ancient Kingdom of Gallia that bordered with Germania.

The land of Halkeginia was prominent to the ocean and had a gentle arc, creating a giant peninsula. Only the original people of the land knew of the words to describe it.

Gallia was located in the southeast and Germania, Kirche's home country, was in the northeast. Tristain was between the two and its size was equivalent to the Netherlands plus Belgium mentioned in Saito's world.

The territories of these two countries was around ten times the size of Tristain. The people of Tristain called their own motherland the 'small country' in self-ridicule.

On the small peninsula in the south facing the sea, countries like Germania had to fight for local hegemony. The religious country of Romalia was involved in

the fight over hegemony; the office of the pope advocated the beliefs of the Founder Brimir and the gods. Incidentally Cardinal Mazarini had come from Romalia.

Towards the east of Halkeginia, there was uncivilized ground where barbarians and demons lived. Further to the east was a vast desert where Elves who could reclaim the barren ground, were protecting the Holy Lands. If we continue east, there was the unknown continent of Rub' al Khali.

Constantly floating above the ocean and the mainland of Halkeginia was the floating continent of Albion. Stricktly speaking, Albion wasn't a part of the mainland of Halkeginia.

Kirche turned to ask Tabitha,

"Why did you study abroad?"

However, Tabitha didn't reply to Kirche's words. She continued to sit and read her book as she had before. Then Kirche suddenly noticed something. The page in her book never changed, it was the same from before. Tabitha had been staring at the same identical page the entire time.

Kirche decided not to ask her again. Whatever her reasons were for studying abroad or returning home, she would wait till Tabitha told her about it by herself. She understood that at that time, when Tabitha was packing her luggage surrounded by the different atmosphere.

Even though they were of different ages they had become friends, and not just because they went to the same school.

To become friends, there are things that the two sides shall not force the other to speak of.

Tabitha who might not open her mouth very often. Kirche being concerned as a senior.

Both of them had their own reason for passing through the border and having gone to Tristain.

As they travelled, Kirche recalled the various political situations of the various

countries. Although she had no interest in politics.

However with the rumors of war floating around she couldn't help but speculate within her mind.

Gallia was still neutral and was staying silent over the invasion of Tristain by Albion. Even though a threat could be felt from the political change in Albion and their new government. A proposal of alliance was made by Tristain but it was rejected. It was very likely that they were going to maintain their neutrality as long as their own territory was safe.

A rumor she had heard however hinted that Gallia was giving rise to the domestic civil strife crisis. With all these internal and external political problems it wasn't easy to imagine the headaches political rulers were facing.

She continued to accompany Tabitha to the Kingdom of Gallia. Although they were travelling as tourists, Kirche had a bad premonition that the possibility of something going wrong was strong.

As she was thinking of this she absent-mindedly stuck her head out the window of the carriage.

A line of pedestrians appeared ahead of the horse drawn carriage. Kirche's attention was grasped by this line of a little less than ten pedestrians. All of them were wearing hooded capes covering their faces.

Kirche noticed that they were all carrying magic wands, they were nobles. Upon another look, the shape of their wands seemed to indicate that they were in fact soldiers. Because it was a time of war, this sort of thing was not unusual.

The horse rushed forward to advance.

Through a gap in the hooded cape, she could see the face of one of the nobles. It was the eyes of a clearly handsome young man. She leaned her head on her hand and sighed.

"A handsome guy, in the place where I am."

After that she noticed it suddenly. *I think I know him by sight*.

"Where have I seen... Who is he..."

She gazed on at him while he was still in sight, her heat rising then cooling. Her enthusiasm soon left when she could no longer see him, he soon became forgotten.

Kirche moved forward and looked at Tabitha. Her limpid blue eyes hidden behind her glasses stared down at the same page of her book.

Gently putting her hand on Tabitha's shoulder, she said in her usual optimistic voice:

"It doesn't matter. No matter what happens, I will be together with you."

So they continued to travel for two more days till they reached the frontier.

At the border checkpoint the guards read their papers and allowed them to enter through. Here was Gallia. The languages and the cultures of Gallia and Tristain resembled each other. They were also known as "the twin crowns".

When they arrived at the border crossing, the guards approached demanding proof for their trip. Holding huge spears the men opened the doors upon confirming Tabitha's and Kirche's travel permits.

He looked at it and said hesitatingly:

"The road up ahead can't be used anymore, you'll have to make a detour."

"Why, what's going on?"

"Because recently the lake overflowed and several roads are already completely flooded."

The Ragdorian Lake was a big lake that stretched along the border of Gallia and Tristain. It was the place with the most beautiful scenery in Halkeginia and had a big reputation.

After advancing for a while along the road, they finally reached an open place. The road was located at the edge of a small number of gentle hills, and the widening of highways separated from the Ragdorian Lake. On the other side of

the shore of the lake was Tristain.

As the guards had said, the water level of the lake seemed certainly to have gone up. Without even being able to see the border of the lake, they could witness that the water had already submerged some of the nearby hills. The flowers and the grass inundated by the water could be seen.

Tabitha closed the book and looked through the window to the outside.

"Is your home near here?"

"Soon."

It was the first time Tabitha had opened her mouth ever since they had gotten in the carriage. However she became silent once again.

Turning onto a mountain road, the horse drawn carriage continued to advance forward to Tabitha's family home. They entered a forest and reached a place where many big oak trees were growing. Farmers were taking a rest in the shaded glade.

Kirche noticed a farmer with a basket of apples and called for the carriage to stop. Then she yelled out to the farmer.

"Those look like some delicious apples, for how much would you sell them to me?"

The farmer took an apple from the basket and passed it to Kirche in exchange for several copper coins.

"There is enough money here to buy the entire basket!"

"Two will be enough."

Kirche took a bite into the apple as the farmer handed the second apple to her. Kirche quickly gave it to Tabitha. She went onto say:

"This apple is really good. What is this piece of land called?"

"The area around Ragdorian is a direct control territory."

"Huh? Direct control territory?"

Territory directly held and managed by the King.

"This land is under direct rule by his highness, and we are now his vassals." The farmer said smiling.

The land was truly fertile and seemed to be something out of a painting with its picturesque beauty. Why the King wanted the land was understandable.

Kirche turned to look at Tabitha.

"This territory is ruled by your family... are you..."

After about ten minutes they could finally see Tabitha's house up ahead. It was an old feudal lord mansion, splendidly built.

Kirche was looking at the carved crest that could be seen at the gate. She was breathless. The emblem was two magic wands intersecting and had the inscription "to advance"

This was the Gallian royal family crest.

However, when approaching, a crack could be seen on the crest. It was a sign of dishonor. Although it meant that this was the royal family, they were stripped of their rights.

The carriage stopped in front of the gates, and an old servant approached, bowed, and opened the door for Tabitha to come out.

"Miss, welcome back."

No other people came and it made Kirche feel as though it was deserted. She got down from the carriage while thinking this. Tabitha and Kirche arrived in the living room with guidance by the old servant.

The room was very neat, however it was strangely quiet, almost appearing spiritless. It looked like a temple preparing for a funeral.

Kirche sat herself down on the living room sofa and said:

"Can we first say hello to your father?"

However Tabitha shook her head.

"Wait here."

She then left the living room.

Kirche sat on the sofa and looked to her right as the old servant approached with wine and dessert and set them before her. But she didn't touch them and instead asked him directly:

"This is her home, and yet it seems besides you no one else lives here."

"I'm the butler of the Orléans family, Percerin. Are you Miss Charlotte's friend?"

Kirche nodded. Charlotte d'Orléans seemed to be Tabitha's real name.

Orléans, Orléans, she kept thinking of the name, and then suddenly she thought of something. *Orléans, isn't it the family name of the younger brother of the King of Gallia?*

"Why is there a dishonor sign on the crest of this house?"

"It appears you are a foreigner, please forgive me, can I ask for your name?"

"I'm Germania's von Zerbst. By the way what on earth is this house? Why has Tabitha gone to study abroad using a fake name? Why when she was just a child?"

The butler listened to Kirche's questions and then sighed.

"The Miss calls herself Tabitha... I see... she has never brought a friend before. Since it's a person to whom she has opened herself, it shouldn't be a problem to tell you the story."

After that Percerin bowed deeply and then continued to talk.

"This residence is in fact a prison."

Tabitha knocked at the door of the deepest room in the residence. There was no answer. It was normal here.

Over the past five years, no one had ever opened the door when it was knocked on. At that time Tabitha was just ten years old.

Tabitha opened the door.

The inside of the room was of a different layout than the rest of the mansion. The only things in the room were a bed, the table, and a chair. Nothing else. The cool breeze flowed in through the open window. The curtains rippled as the wind pushed against them. The inside of the room wasn't disturbed by the intrusion.

Holding a doll tightly with her hands. There was a thin and tall woman. What remained of her beautiful face was now gone because of a disease. She was between thirty five and forty years old, but she looked twenty years old.

She peeped at Tabitha with terrified eyes just like a child.

"Who is it?"

Tabitha bowed deeply while approaching the woman.

"I have returned, mother."

However the woman didn't acknowledge Tabitha as her daughter. Not only that, but she also turned coldly to Tabitha and said:

"Go away, you insolent girl! Are you a spy of the royal family? You want to snatch my beautiful daughter Charlotte from my hands? I will never give Charlotte to you!"

Tabitha didn't respond and kept her head bowed.

"How horrible to even pretend that this child would one day aim for the throne...

I have had enough of dirty court life! We just want a quiet life... just leave me now!"

The mother threw the glass of water on the table at Tabitha. Tabitha didn't avoid it. It struck her head and rolled on the floor.

The mother returned to rubbing the doll's face. Part of its face was exposed and revealed the cotton underneath, most likely worn out from all the previous times the mother had rubbed it with her hand.

Tabitha revealed a sad smile, an expression she would only show in this room in front of her mother.

"Your husband has been killed, that's why you are this way; anyhow, I will be leaving now, but I will come back sooner or later. Until that day, please pray for your daughter-doll's safety."

The wind blew into the room through the open windows, shaking the curtains. Even though it was early summer, the wind that blew from the lake was chilly.

"A victim of a succession fight?" When Kirche asked it, Percerin nodded.

"Yes, it happened five years ago with the death of the King. He left behind two crown princes. The one on the throne now is the eldest son, Joseph. Miss Charlotte's father, the Duke of Orleans, was the second son."

"So she really does belong to the royal family."

"The Duke of Orleans was talented and loved by all and appeared as a qualified ruler in the eyes of the people, even though he had to meet hardships being the second son. Because of this, many people supported the Duke and wanted him to take the throne. The palace was then divided into two factions, launching into an ugly struggle for power.

Finally, the Duke of Orleans was murdered. He was struck in the chest with a poisoned arrow. A person who was nobler than anyone else in this country was killed not by magic, but by a poisoned arrow. The regret and the indignation were unimaginable. However the tragedy was far from over."

Percerin took a deep breath and continued.

"Next those who made Joseph the King started targeting the Miss. They wanted to stamp out the source of any possible future trouble. These people summoned Madame and the Miss to a banquet in their honor. However, they had poisoned the Miss' drink. Madame had realized this, and in order to protect the Miss, drank it herself. A magic which breaks one's mind had been cast on the water. Since then, Madame has been insane."

Kirche, shocked and at a loss for words, was listening to the butler's confession.

"Since then, the Miss sealed away her words and expressions. Miss Charlotte originally was lively and bright, a different person than she is now. However it is understandable. Anyone who would witness their mother going mad would become like that.

"The others, knowing they had failed and in order to protect themselves, sent a royal order to Miss Charlotte. The task was extremely difficult, no one had been able to accomplish it alive.

"However the Miss did complete the task and pledged her loyalty to the royal family, to protect them. But Miss Charlotte was still treated coldly by the royal family. Normally this achievement would have been enough to deserve a territory, but instead she was granted the title of Chevalier and was forced to study abroad.

"The Madame stayed here at the house, in the current condition she is in."

Percerin bit his lip with regrets.

"Then...! Whenever the royal family had a difficult task to be done, they asked her to do their dirty work? Her father was killed, her mother was poisoned and driven insane, and she is led and directed by her personal enemies like a beast of burden! I never knew something could be as tragic as this, how people could be so cruel to this level."

Kirche now realized why Tabitha had remained silent. She had never known the reason why she was given the title of Chevalier was for a task that she hadn't applied for.

On their travels she had remained staring at the same page in her book.

Her runic name was 'Snowstorm'. Cold wind had been blowing inside her heart and it still hadn't ceased. This cold feeling she felt, Kirche thought, was unimaginable.

"Didn't you say that the Miss introduces herself as Tabitha?"

"Yes."

"Madame was a very busy person, however, the young Miss kept an open and bright disposition. The young Miss was in fact quite lonely. Madame had gone into the city and had selected a doll especially for the young Miss during her busy schedule. The Miss was very happy and treated it as though it were a sister. Now the doll is in the hands of Madame. Because of the current state of her mind, she believes the doll to be Miss Charlotte."

Kirche was startled.

"Tabitha. That is the name the young Miss gave to the doll."

Suddenly the door opened and Tabitha walked in.

The butler bowed, hiding his painful expression and handed her a letter from the royal family.

"These are the instructions from the royal family."

Tabitha removed the seal after receiving the letter and began to read it casually. When she had finished reading it she nodded lightly.

"When do you intend to begin?"

Tabitha answered as if she was just scheduling a stroll.

"Tomorrow."

"Understood, I will convey this to the envoys. I wish you safety on your completion of this task."

The butler bowed solemnly and left the room. Tabitha walked over to Kirche.

"Wait here."

Kirche shook her head.

"Sorry, I heard everything, I'm also coming."

"Dangerous."

"I can't let you go alone."

Tabitha didn't answer. However she lowered her head lightly.

That night the two slept together in the same room. As soon as Tabitha had hit the bed, she had fallen asleep. Kirche was sleepless and lay on the sofa with one hand under the pillow.

Tabitha had explained to Kirche what the task would require of her, and asked Kirche if she would indeed come.

"Although I promised... this certainly will be no ordinary task."

It was very likely that they could die attempting to complete this task. But as a noble, the risk of death had always been in the not so distant future. Compared to that, she was more worried about this child.

What incredible loneliness this child must have endured?

Tabitha was turning over in her bed. With her glasses now gone, her sleeping face was the one of an innocent young girl.

It didn't show that she was shouldering unhappiness that didn't suit her age, the distinguished services that had conferred her the title of Chevalier and the difficult assignment that she had to complete.

"Mom."

Tabitha muttered in her sleep. Kirche's shoulders reacted to the word.

"Mom, don't drink it. Mom."

Tabitha called for her mother many times while sleeping. Her forehead constantly kept sweating with more intensity after each call.

Kirche gently stood up, laid on the bed next to Tabitha, embracing her closely. Tabitha buried her head in Kirche's chest. Her heartbeat passed on to Tabitha as they lay there, it might have felt like a mother's.

Tabitha soon became calm again, her night sweat leaving her.

As for Kirche, she thought that she somehow understood the reason why Tabitha treated her as a friend. Her heart hadn't been totally frozen, some warmth still remained within it. Only that the ice wind that flowed blocked it. She might have felt that the fire inside Kirche could melt it.

Kirche, while slowly falling asleep, said in a gentle manner:

"Hey Charlotte. The 'Ardent' warms and melts everything, so you can rest at ease."

# Chapter Five: The Strength of a Love Potion

When Saito woke up in the morning, Louise was sleeping by his side. The previous night, when Louise, whose eyes were swollen from tears, got tired, he brought her to the room and fell asleep at once. "Kuukuu," with an innocent face, she breathed out through sleep. *What made her change this way yesterday? One moment she was ready to kill, the other - she was suddenly weeping "Why don't you look at me!" What? What?* Saito wondered.

She started waking up. Abruptly, Louise got up and, noticing Saito, bit her lip. Then in a wrung out voice, she murmured "Good morning."

"G-good morning," Saito returned the greeting.

Then Louise blushed. Louise always blushed with an angry look on her face, but now it was different. Looking up at Saito, she softly curved her lips and said something hesitatingly.

"W-what?"

"Forgive me."

Louise opened her mouth and said in a lamenting voice.

"Forgivemeforgivemeforgiveme. Forgive me?"

Louise was definitely weird. She gazed at him with helpless puppy eyes, yet she had never looked at Saito this way before. Louise always looked down on him or scowled, he wasn't used to being looked at some other away.

"Seriously, what is wrong with you?"

Worried, he gripped her shoulder. Dressed only in negligee, Louise bent her head and rested her cheek on top of his hand. He felt an unexpected pang. Moreover, a pang on his left side. A quick one. Soon he was fully overtaken by a destructive power. His body shook violently and his pulse was beating hastily. *Aah, Louise looking like this… She wouldn't be in love with me, would she?!*

"I saw."

"Eh?"

"..a dream, yesterday."

Dream?

"W-what dream?"

"A Dream about Saito."

"D-dream about what?"

"Saito was mean in the dream. Though I was trying my hardest to talk to him, he still spoke with other girls."

'Gab' Louise bit into Saito's hand.

However, it was not painful. Louise bit very gently. Then she glanced upwards at Saito's face.

"Even so, it was yesterday. Do not buy gifts for other girls, do not look at other girls - you have your master-sama, right?"

Saito gulped down saliva, while watching Louise. He never realized, that she was so in love with him...

*But what made Louise's attitude change so much. It's as if she is an entirely different person. Louise who despised me up till now, cannot become so sweet just like that.* At first she was mad, and now she gently chewed on his palm while scowling.

She would not just bite like this. She would hit.

Louise would never sell herself for such flirt...

Though at first Saito thought that Louise may be in love, he drove the last ray of hope out of his mind.

"Listen to me."

"Y-yes."

"Tell me truthfully. W-whom do you love the most in the world?"

Louise buried her face in his chest and muttered in a tearful voice. Saito felt dizzy in his head and answered incoherently.

"M-master-sama. Yes."

"Lies."

It wasn't a lie. When near, only Louise could make his chest throb this much. However, Louise today...

"Really?"

"Yeah..."

Then Louise got up and, tototo, ran up to the other side of the bed.

After taking out something from the secret gap in the wall beside the bed, she ran up to Saito with it.

"N. N, nh"

And then she thrust it out to Saito.

"What's...?"

"Take it."

The thrust out complex object was made from knitting wool. In any case, it seemed to be unwearable. Saito received it and tilted his head, trying to figure out it's purpose. By any means, could it still be something "to wear"? No, never.

He had no inkling of where it could fit on the body.

Louise kept on quietly watching Saito... with eyes that seemed to be moist from crying. Aah, he could't help it when he was looked at with such eyes. They had an expecting look. Yet, he couldn't answer Louise's expectations as he didn't know what on earth it was for, however, he had to do something!

*What the heck is that*. Saito thought. *Think! Yeaaah, looking at it, it seems similar to medusa stuffed toy. It also can be thought to be one of Burgess fauna's species that ruled the sea in the ancient earth. Though it looks like a mysterious animal, because Louise handed it over to me, it must have some use. Ah! Think!*

Saito fused, slowly losing his cool.

"Great! This! A fantastic thing! Medusa's outlook! The best!"

Louise's face fell.

"It's different... It's not that... It's a sweater."

As for the alien world sweater, it was different from what one would expect. It easily surpassed Saito’s imagination.

In panic, Saito tried to put it on. But how to wear it? Somehow he found an entrance and pushed his head in. However, his arm didn't go out and half of his face remained stuck inside. Being stuck in such an uncomfortable way, Saito stood still.

Then, Louise tightly embraced Saito and pushed him down onto the bed.

“L-Louise...”

Because his arm was imprisoned by the sweater, he could not move.

“Be still," Louise pleaded with Saito. *What? I’m already still. But it is because I can’t get out my arms out of the sweater.*

“Can’t do that.”

He said quietly, being honest.

Louise held onto Saito firmly, like a girl embracing her favorite stuffed animal.

“Ugh, don’t you have to go to class?”

“It’s alright. I’ll just skip it anyway.”

*Muhaa!* The more he thought about it, the more suspicious it sounded. Normally serious Louise never skipped class so lightly.

“For a whole day. Because, when you are let out, you flirt with other girls. I hate that.”

Seems like she wanted to bind Saito this way. Yet, for a very prideful Louise to say such things… Even if she would be feeling this way, she’d never utter it aloud.

“Say something.”

Louise muttered sweetly. *Saito, what is the matter with Louise?* He wondered, while worrying, what made Louise start talking so weakly and softly.

In the afternoon, Louise finally fell asleep. The young girl snored faintly in a deep slumber.

Then Saito quietly slipped out of the room and headed to the dining room to get some food. He was going to take Louise’s share too.

Siesta, who was preparing lunch in the kitchen already, sweetly smiled when he finished explaining the situation to her.

“You are popular.”

“No, it’s different. Louise isn’t herself. She’s acting funny. It can’t be helped, and now I have to get some of this food…”

Saito said worriedly. As he said this, Siesta trampled on Saito’s feet, without breaking her smile.

“That’s great.”

“S-Siesta?"

It seemed like she was really mad. The composed smile only emphasized her cold anger.

“Heeeh. That a highly prideful noble Miss Vallière would suddenly become clingy over Saito-san. What would make her change her mind about Saito-san? I’m worried.”

Still smiling, Siesta put more strength into crushing Saito’s foot. Saito screamed.

“I-it’s true! She really suddenly started acting strange”

“Really?”

“Yeah… It is as if she turned into a different person.”

Hearing that, Siesta started to think with a serious expression.

“This reminds me, I heard that there are some magical potions that can change a person’s mind this way…”

“Magical potions?”

“Indeed. Yet because I am not a mage I might have not understood it well... But, Miss Vallière would not drink such a thing…”

Saito remembered the previous night. Louise's attitude changed dramatically after entering Montmorency’s room… while he was hiding under the bed futon.

At that moment Louise’s attitude changed suddenly… Did Louise do something then?

*Ah.*

That reminds me, she said “Fuah! I’m thirsty from running around!” and in one breath drank up the red wine on the table!

That? Could it be that? *Saito started to feel suspicious about the red wine in*

*Montmorency's room.*

Saito waited for Montmorency to come out of the dining room and gripped her arm. Guiche, who was walking next to her, roared.

"Hey! What are you doing to my Montmorency!"

However, Montmorency's face suddenly turned pale instead of complaining. What?! Even though he gripped a noble's arm like that! Guess Montmorency, who was even more arrogant than Louise, did not want to make much noise. In a word, she felt indebted to Saito over something and that was surely related to Louise's sudden change.

"Hey Monmon."

Saito glared at Montmorency.

"W-what…?"

She awkwardly turned her eyes away. She was not angry at being called Monmon. It was becoming more and more suspicious.

"What did you make Louise drink?"

"Eh?" Guiche made a suspicious face.

"Montmorency gave Louise something?"

"Hey Guiche. You saw Louise's change, right? One moment she was angry, the next placing her palms gently. Even someone as dimwitted as you should grow suspicious."

Guiche thought while crossing his arms. It took some time, because he was slow as usual. Then Guiche, who with great effort recalled the previous night's events, nodded.

"It is really as you say. It should not be possible for Louise to become so soft

suddenly. Right?”

“Right! Monmon! Louise became strange after drinking the wine in your room!”

“That’s the wine I brought! There’s nothing suspicious about it!”

After saying so, Guiche noticed Montmorency’s unusual behavior. She was biting her lips strongly and tiny drops of cold sweat appeared on her forehead.

“Montmorency! That wine, really…”

“That child drank it without permission!”

Montmorency cried out, unable to take it anymore.

“That’s not the point! It’s your fault!” She said while pointing at Guiche, poking his nose with her finger. Now with the anger reversed, Guiche and Saito dumbfoundedly watched Montmorency.

“Because you are always fooling around!”

“You! What have you put in the wine?!”

Saito understood. Montmorency wanted Guiche to drink up something that was put in the wine. Yet Louise, who rushed into the room, drank it up instead.

For a moment, both, Guiche and Saito, stood hesitatingly embarrassed and resigned. Then Montmorency in a calm, bared voice said.

“…Love potion.”

“Love potion!”

Guiche and Saito cried out. Montmorency placed both hands over their mouths in panic.

“Idiots! Not so loud! …It is banned.”

Saito gripped Montmorency’s arm, removed her hand from his mouth and shouted.

“Then don’t start such a mess to begin with! Help Louise somehow!”

Montmorency, Saito and Guiche racked their brains in Montmorency's room. Montmorency explained to them both in an arrogant manner that she made a love potion to prevent Guiche from having an affair. She put it in Guiche's glass to have him drink it, but then Saito and Louise had flounced into the room. It wasn’t hard for Saito to imagine what happened after that. Unaware, Louise drank it all up. Saito screamed.

“What have you done?!”

“…However, otherwise she would not have fallen in love with me, right?”

Guiche, who kept silent till then, clasped a blushing Montmorency's hand.

“Montmorency, you cared so much for me…”

“Hah! You think that I did it for you? I would not waste my time on that. It was just merely unpleasant for you to have affairs behind my back!”

The blush on Montmerency’s cheeks was quickly replaced by an arrogant scowl. As expected, the pride of Tristainian noble women was really high. Very self-conceited and arrogant.

“Do not worry about me having an affair! I am your servant forever!”

Guiche embraced Montmorency closely. Then, holding her cheek, tried to kiss her. Startled Montmorency shut her eyes.

“Knock it off.”

Saito pulled them both apart.

“What are you doing, idiot?!”

“Doesn’t matter! Help Louise first!”

“She’ll recover sooner or later!”

“When is this ‘sooner or later’!”

Montmorency looked doubtful.

“Each person's physiology is different, it may take a month or maybe a year…”

“You planned to let me drink such a thing?”

Guiche turned pale.

“That will take too long. At once! One way or another! Do it!”

With a jerk Saito brought his face close to Montmorency’s.

“I understand! But it will take some time to prepare the antidote!”

“Hurry up then and do it! Now! Make it now!”

“However, to make an antidote a certain expensive drug is necessary, but I used it all up while making the love potion and it is very expensive. I can’t do it for the time being.”

"Yes, money will be hard to come by, I don't exaggerate."

"No money? You are nobles!"

When Saito shouted, Guiche and Montmorency looked at each other.

“Although we are nobles, we are students as well.”

“It is older members of the family that possess the territory and money.”

“Then ask your parents to send the money.”

Saito said to them both. Then Guiche raised his forefinger and started talking.

“Listen. This world has two kinds of nobles. One kind are nobles that do not have the good fortune of money, and the other kind are nobles that do have money. For instance, de Montmorency, Montmorency's family, is a failure when

it comes to land reclamation, and the management of their territory is horrible.”

Montmorency cut in.

“Or like the de Gramont house, Guiche’s family, that for the sake of honour got involved in a war and wasted all of their money…”

“Anyway, there are moneyless nobles. Actually, and I am not exaggerating, half the nobles in the world have enough money only to maintain their residence and the territory around it at best. However, it is not for a commoner like you to understand the hardships of keeping the honour and pride of the nobility.”

*These guys…* Saito reluctantly started to search for something in his parka and jeans pockets. Then he pulled out the golden coins that he received from Henrietta before. Half of the amount he left in Louise’s room and the other half he carried with himself.

"Will this suffice?"

He spilled them out on the table.

“Uwaa! Why do you have so much money? You!”

Seeing that amount of gold lying all over the table took Montmorency's breath away.

“Awesome, and some are even 500 écu coins.”

“Don’t ask where it comes from. Just buy that expensive medicine with this by the end of tomorrow."

Montmorency nodded reluctantly.

When he returned to his room with light pockets, the room itself looked weird.

Somehow the whole room was filled with cigarette-like smokes, yet the aroma was sweet. Louise was sitting in the center of the room with joss-sticks fuming

around her.

“Hey, what? What’s up with all this?”

When Saito said so, Louise, who was watching him, answered in a teary voice.

“Where have you been...?”

Only then Saito noticed how tempting Louise looked. She wasn’t wearing her skirt.

“You left me all alone…”

She said in teary voice while sulkily looking up at Saito. It seemed like, while feeling lonely, she started burning all these incenses.

“So-sorry…”

*Why doesn't she put on a skirt?!* He tried to turn his eyes away from her body when he noticed another unexpected fact. *Well… Lo-Louise, Louise Françoise – that rascal, the skirt wasn’t the only thing that she was missing… Her panties are gone as well.*

Her lower waist line was peeking up from the gap of her shirt. There were no signs of any underwear beneath.

Saito began to tremble.

"Y-you, p-put on some p-p-p-p-panties!"

Trembling, he shouted while looking to the other side.

“I w-won’t!”

“Why not?!!”

“I am not sexy enough. I know this because night after night Saito sleeps by my side in bed, but doesn't do anything to me. I cannot take this anymore.”

Louise said in a weeping voice.

“T-that’s, you, me, are you saying you want me to p-push you down and then d-d-d-d-do those things to you?”

“I-is it bad…?”

“That’s right.”

“But, I'll shut my eyes and for an hour, I will pretend not to know.”

But by saying that she would pretend not to know… Louise made a huge commitment.

Louise pulled the hem of her shirt down to cover her private parts and stood up. Louise moved her bare, slender legs. Saito's heart pounded inside his chest, sounding like a constant ringing of a bell.

Louise jumped onto Saito’s chest. The sweet smell of her hair was even stronger than the aroma of the incense in the room. She never used perfumes, it was her natural body’s smell.

With her face buried in Saito’s parka, Louise trembled and twitched.

“I am lonely… Idiot…”

Both of Saito’s hands positioned themselves on Louise’s body.

They seemed to embrace her firmly on an instinct.

Saito bit his lip. He put some pressure in his bite seeking to regain part of his calmness through pain.

Louise of today… is not the Louise whom I know. It is a love potion that's making me lose myself. My Louise is the one I protect and like… For this reason, I cannot embrace her this way now. What if his brakes would fail him? He surely would covet Louise like a beast.

Because of love, this cannot be allowed.

Saito with trembling hands gripped Louise's shoulders. Then he looked straight into her eyes and squeezed out as gentle a voice as possible.

"Louise…"

"Saito…"

"W-well… You are acting this strange today because of a medicine."

"Medicine…?"

Louise looked up at Saito with moistened eyes.

"That's right. The present you is not the real you. But don't worry, I will find the cure somehow. Okay?"

"It is not because of medicine!"

Louise looked straight at Saito.

"These feelings are not because of medicine. Because whenever I look at Saito my heart starts beating wildly. Not only that…I cannot breathe and feel helpless. I know, this feeling is…"

"I-it's different. I would like it if they were your real feelings, but they aren't, it is different. This is because of the drug. The antidote will be ready by tomorrow night, so wait till then. Anyway, go to sleep now, okay?"

Louise shook her head.

"I don't understand. It doesn't matter. Anyway, you must hug me tightly or else I won't go to sleep."

"If I do, you'll go to bed?"

Louise nodded. Saito carried her to the bed. Then laid down, snuggling next to her. As usual, Louise clung firmly to him.

“Don’t go anywhere. Look only at me, no other girls, only me.”

She repeated, as if some kind of spell.

Saito nodded.

“I won’t go anywhere. I’ll stay here for a long time.”

“Really?”

“Aah. Yes, so rest, ok?”

“Un… If Saito says to sleep, I will sleep. Because I don’t want him to dislike me.”

However, Louise didn’t go to sleep. Instead, she shuffled a little and brought her blushing face to the scruff of Saito’s neck. Before Saito could even think of what she was doing, she started to kiss his neck. It felt as if a torrent of small needles ran down his spine.

“Haaaaaaaaaaah...”

Saito started to shake in fear. Meanwhile Louise started to suck strongly on Saito’s skin.

“Louise! Louise!”

*If you don’t stop I’ll die.* However, Louise didn't stop. With flushing cheeks she watched the place that she just kissed. It reddened as if bitten by an insect.

Noticing this, Louise proceeded leaving marks on Saito’s skin with an absorbed interest.

“Louise, stop! I already! I! Aah!”

His mind could not take it anymore. When Louise separated her lips, she muttered in a sulky way.

“No. I won’t stop. Saito is mine and mine alone. Therefore, I will leave marks to show that he is mine and keep the other girls away.”

After that, Saito’s torture continued for a while. Louise started to leave hickey marks not only on the scurf of his neck but even on his chest too. By the end, there were ten of them.

Saito’s strong convulsions turned into a faint shiver, when Louise’s lips finally left his chest. Then Louise, turned her head to the side, presenting Saito her own neck.

“Now you mark me.”

“B-but…”

Saito looked at Louise’s slender, snowy white neck.

“If you don’t do this - I won’t go to sleep.”

There was no other way. Saito closed his eyes and brought his lips to Louise’s neck. He touched it. A deep sigh escaped Louise’s lips. Never having heard such a cute sigh from her before, Saito almost died.

Very nervous, he sucked on Louise’s celadon skin.

“Nh…!”

Louise must have been nervous too, as giving out such a cry seemed to confirm.

Tiredness soon took over her and Louise started to breathe in a faint sleeper’s way after a while.

Dazzled he looked at his own red mark on Louise’s nape of the neck. It looked like a red strawberry in the middle of white snow.

Saito breathed roughly, he had to restrain himself many times, or else, he would have attacked Louise who was peacefully sleeping next to him.

*Calm down! Louise is acting this way only because of the potion!*

He had to find the antidote quickly, to return Louise back to her usual saucy self,

instead of this cute one!

Then Saito noticed something that Louise was grasping tightly in her sleep.

It was the pendant that Saito bought her in town. She was grasping it tightly as if it were some sort of treasure. Seeing that lovely view he lost all his strength.

It was cruel. Louise was horrible. It’s a crime to look so disturbingly cute.

Subconsciously, he extended his hand towards Louise, only to clamp it with his other one. *I don’t have the right to take advantage of Louise this way. It is not because of me. It’s because of the potion. Endure it.*

*If only I wouldn't have wanted for Siesta to wear that sailor uniform, Louise would have not turned into this… Therefore it is my fault.*

I am useless, Saito thought. I never turn down an opportunity to flirt with a girl and…

Siesta. That's right, Siesta.

Aah, Siesta, she would calm him down simply by her presence. She was a fine looking lass too.

But when Louise was nearby she made his heart race.

*Aah, which one do I love more?*

What a luxurious worry. He couldn't even imagine having such worries back on Earth.

Watching Louise's sleeping face, he started to think… *why return back to his former world, if you can stay here?*

When Louise became a court lady of Henrietta, it became difficult to travel to the east… Though he was disappointed, at the same time he felt glad. Because of that he could stay by Louise's side.

Aah, Earth, Siesta and Louise. Those three turned round and round in Saito's head, making him frustrated.

*Which choice should I make?* He could not make a choice today, but he would have to.

Maybe, in the near future.

In the evening the next day, Saito was in Montmorency's room. He had a quarrel with Louise before leaving her in her room and coming here…

"You can't make an antidote?"

With his face lifted, Saito stared at Montmorency. Beside her sat Guiche holding his chin and scowling.

Montmorency and Guiche had gone into the city that day to face the black-market traders in the hopes of finding the antidote, however....

“It can't be helped! It was sold out!”

"Then when can you buy it?!"

“It… seems like they do not have the goods needed.”

“What is it?”

“The specific medicine comes from Ragdorian Lake, at the border with Gallia. It is made from the tears of a water spirit… however it seems they were not able to contact the water spirits recently."

“Whaat?!”

“In other words, we cannot get this special medicine.”

“Then what about Louise?”

"Well, I mean, really, what is so bad about all this? She has fallen in love with you. You like Louise, do you not?"

Saito couldn't consent with what Guiche said, though.

“I can’t be happy if the reason she likes me is because of that medicine. These are not Louise’s true feelings. That’s why I want Louise to return back to her original self.”

But… Montmorency pouted her lips and Guiche shook his head reluctantly. Even Saito thought quietly for a while, until he finally grasped his hand into a fist, determined.

“Where is that water spirit?”

"I told you already, it's at the Ragdorian lake.”

”So you only need to get in touch with her, right?”

“Eeeeeh!? Now listen here! The water spirit rarely shows her face before humans! And even if she did, she is very strong! If angered, the results can be disastrous!"

“I don't care, let’s go!”

"Well I do care! I am absolutely not going!"

Saito crossed his arms.

“Well then, there's only one thing I can do. I will have to tell Her Royal Highness the Princess about the love potion, or is it Her Royal Highness the Queen now? Anyway, I will have to ask for her help about the problem. Come to think, wasn't that potion banned? It's not supposed to be allowed to be made, right? Now then, I wonder what would Her Highness do if she learned about it?”

Montmorency's face quickly turned pale.

“What do you think, Monmon?”

“Fine, already! I understand! I will go, if you go!”

“Hmm, we can't let Louise stay this way, either. Or else others may notice her strange behaviour and suspect the love potion.”

Guiche shook his head.

“Fear not, my lover. I will stay by your side on this journey," said Guiche while leaning in and trying to slowly put his hand over Montmorency's shoulders, but she quickly evaded him.

“That’s not really inspiring. You are too weak.”

After that, the trio made arrangements for the journey.

They would leave the following day, early in the morning. Because they did not know how Louise might act if left alone, they decided to bring her along as well.

“Haah, this is my first time skipping school.” Montmorency sighed.

“And what about me, as I have not been going to school for half of a year now? After Saito came, it was adventures everyday! Ahahaha!” Guiche burst into a hearty laughter.

# Chapter Six: The Water Spirit

The hills and mountains overlooked the dark blue waves of Ragdorian Lake as they rippled. The sun's illumination on the lake was spread like a layer of shimmering glass.

Saito and the others arrived at the lake on horseback.

Because Louise disliked riding alone, she and Saito took the same horse. She sat in front. It seemed like she didn‘t want to leave Saito‘s side even for a single moment.

Montmorency and Guiche were riding on separate splendid grey horses.

"This must be the famous Ragdorian lake! No, the beauty of this lake is indescribable! The Water Spirit is in there! I’m impressed! HO-HO-HO – YAHOO!" yelled Guiche while whipping the horse and sending it plunging down the hill.

However the horse was afraid of water and when it reached the shore it came to an abrupt stop. Following the laws of inertia Guiche flung off his horse and, with a thunderous crash, fell head first into the lake.

“Can’t reach the ground! It’s deep! Deeeeeeep!”

Guiche desperately cried out for help while struggling in the water. It seemed that Guiche did not know how to swim.

“I wonder if we should reconsider our fellowship after all?” muttered Montmorency.

Saito nodded.”That would be nice.“

Louise looked up at Saito with a worried face. “Montmorency is nice?”

“I d-don’t mean that. Just wait. I will return you to your normal self.“

Saito then brought the horse close to the shore.

Guiche, after a long struggle, was shivering and soaked from head to toe when he finally reached the shore. He had a bitter look on his face.

“Hey hey, shouldn’t you help me? Do not desert someone who cannot swim!”

However, Montmorency completely ignored Guiche and was instead looking at the lake suspiciously.

Saito asked. “What is it?”

And Montmorency answered, “Strange.”

"What's strange?"

"The water level has risen. Ragdorian's shore should be further down."

"Really?"

“Yes. Look over there. That is a rooftop sticking out. It seems that the village has been flooded.“

Following Montmorency's gaze, they could indeed see the roof. Saito could even recognize the dark shadow of a sunken house in the clear water.

Montmorency walked up to the shore, dipped her finger into the water and closed her eyes. After a while she stood back up with a worried expression on her face.

"It seems as if the Water Spirit is angry."

"How do you know that?"

”Because I am a Water-element user, Montmorency the Fragrant. The Tristain Royal family is connected with the Water Spirit of Ragdorian lake by an old oath. The Montmorency ‘Water’ family has been negotiating with it for many generations."

“And now?”

“And now, for many reasons, other nobles are doing it as well.”

"Then, have you seen the Water Spirit?"

“Only once when I was young. When we needed to create a drainage for the territory, my family sought the Water Spirit's cooperation. A big glass container was made to transport it. However, because the Water Spirit has a lot of pride, it can be extremely aggressive. In fact, it is because of it's aggressiveness that my family's drainage scheme failed. My father said to the Water Spirit ‘ Don't walk. The floor will get wet’…”

"What does the Water Spirit look like?"

Saito asked while showing curiosity.

"I have never actually seen it."

Guiche, flapping his wet shirt that he took off, nodded in agreement. Louise, who had absolutely no interest in the discussion, hid herself behind Saito’s back and unconsciously held on tight to the hem of his parka.

“Beautiful! Quite so…”

At that moment, an old lonesome farmer hidden behind a tree stepped out.

“I suppose, my lords, that you are nobles.”

The farmer looked away with an embarrassed face.

“What’s the matter?” Montmorency asked.

“My lords, did you come to negotiate with the Water Spirit? If so, then we have been saved! Please, quickly make your negotiations and solve this flood problem."

The party looked at each other. It seemed like this farmer was a resident of the village that sank into the lake.

“That, well, we... came here just to see the lake.“

Ultimately, Montmorency could not tell him that they came here to get the Water Spirit‘s tear.

“I see… Really, lords and the queen are now only interested in the war against the Albion, not even noticing such remote villages as ours. They can’t even imagine how hard it is to collect the harvest…”

“Haa,” the farmer sigh deeply.

“What on earth happened to the Ragdorian lake?”

"The water started to rise about two years ago. The water level increased slowly, flooding the port first, then the temple and fields... See? Now even the eagles' nests are flooded. The local lords that are responsible for this territory indulge in entertainments in the royal court and pay no attention to our pleas.“

“Yoyoyo,” the old farmer weeped bitterly.

“For years we lived on this land, depending on the moody Water Spirit. Honestly, it‘s good when it stays at the bottom of the lake... We really want to understand why it has suddenly become interested in our land. Because this land belongs to men! But, only a noble could communicate with it. I'd like to know what we poor farmers did to make it lose its temper.“

Saito and the others bent their heads in embarrassment.

After the farmer finished grumbling and left, Montmorency took something out of the bag attached to her waist. It was a tiny frog. It was bright yellow with many black spots.

Montmorency put the frog in the palm of her hand, it stared up at her inquisitively.

“Frog!” Louise, who was afraid of frogs, screamed and drew closer to Saito.

“What is with this poisonously colored frog?”

“It is not poisonous, I tell you! It is my dear familiar!”

Apparently this tiny frog was Montmorency's familiar. Montmorency raised her finger, and gave an order to her familiar.

“Listen Robin, I want to contact an old friend of yours.”

Then Montmorency reached in her pocket and took out a needle, in one brief moment she stuck her finger with it allowing a ruby of bright red blood to gush. Turning her finger over she let a drop fall on the frog.

After that, Montmorency cast a spell, treating the wound on the tip of her finger. Then she brought the frog close again.

"Since she knows who I am, she should know who you are. Robin, please, in the name of the great spirits of the dead, seek the old Water Spirit, and tell her I wish to speak with her because of our alliance. Do it for me, understand?"

The frog slightly nodded and disappeared into the water with a splash.

"Now, Robin went to call the Water Spirit. If she can find it, she is likely to bring it here.”

Saito looked doubtful. He hesitantly said “When it comes, we have to tell it a sad story, but I wonder what could be good. Maybe this story I know about a master and a dog would do. However, it is very old and I wonder if it would be suitable…”

“Sad story? What are you talking about?”

“Because we need tears of the Water Spirit. How else would we get them if we don't make it cry?”

“You really are ignorant. Well, I guess since even non-water element mages don't know it either so it is unreasonable to expect a commoner like you to know. The Tear of the Water Spirit is only a name. It doesn't really shed tears.“

Saito and Guiche looked at each other. Louise, lonely without Saito’s attention, rubbed her cheek against his back. It was really weird! Though one could die from such a cute Louise, all that mattered now was Montmorency’s story.

"Then, what is the tear of the Water Spirit?" Guiche asked.

“The Water Spirit... compared to humans, can live a long, long, long time. It is said to have existed 6,000 years ago, when the Founder Brimir established Halkeginia. Its body, like water, can freely change its shape... and in a sunshine it glistens with seven colors…”

The moment Montmorency said this, the surface of the water began to shine.

The Water Spirit had appeared.

30 meters away from the shore where Saito and others were standing, the water was shining.

The surface of the water was churning non-stop. Then the water swelled up like a rising cake. Saito watched it with an expression of surprise. The water was constantly changing shape so one could not even see hands. It looked like a huge amoeba. Though its flashing lights were beautiful... it made them uncomfortable.

The frog, Montmorency’s familiar, hopped back to its master with a splash. Montmorency held out her palm and caught the frog and patted the frog’s head with her finger.

"Thank you for helping to bring it."

Then Montmorency stood up, spread her hands towards the Water Spirit, and opened her mouth.

“I am a Montmorency Margarita La Fère de Montmorency. User of water, member of the lineage of old oath. I have put my blood on the frog to help you remember. If you remember, answer in a way and with words that we understand.”

The Water Spirit... rising out of the surface of the water... slowly started to gain shape like a clay figure.

Saito's eyes popped out from surprise while watching this.

The mass of water slowly shaped itself into Montmorency‘s form and smiled faintly.

However, it was bigger than her and had no clothes. It looked like a nude, transparent Montmorency. It was just like an ice statue.

The Water Spirit’s expression changed into various forms. After the smile followed anger, and then crying faces. Each time she tried a new expression, the face of the water moved.

Indeed, she looked beautiful. Like a constantly changing jewel.

Then her face became expressionless again as the Water Spirit answered Montmorency’s question.

“I remember, human. I remember the liquid that flows in your body. The moon has changed 52 times since our last meeting.”

“I’m glad. Water Spirit, I need to ask you something. Although it might seem somewhat insensitive, could you give me a piece of your body?“

*Part of its body?* Saito wondered. *What‘s that?*

When he poked Montmorency, she turned around annoyed.

"Although it is a tear, it is impossible to make immortal spirits cry. They are... different from us. I do not even know if one can call them living beings. Either way the tear of the Water Spirit is a part of its body."

"So we have to cut down its body?!"

Saito shouted in surprise.

“Shh! Not so loud! The Water Spirit can get very angry! That’s why it is nearly impossible to obtain the tear. How the people in the city's black market are able to get it… I simply cannot imagine."

The Water Spirit smiled.

"Oh, it smiled! It must mean it's ok!"

But, the words that came out of its mouth... maybe because it still didn‘t understand how to to speak properly, were completely opposite of its expression.

"I refuse, human."

"Is that so? How unfortunate. Oh well, we'll be heading back now."

Saito was shocked by how easily Montmorency gave up.

“Hey hey! Wait a moment! Don’t give up on Louise so easily! Hey, Water Spirit!”

Saito pushed Montmorency aside and faced the Water Spirit.

“Wait! You! Stop it! Don’t anger the Water Spirit!”

Montmorency tried to thrust Saito aside, but Saito didn’t even flinch. Guiche inclined his head wondering. Louise silently drew closer to Saito. Seeing such a scene, it was hard to tell which one of them was the familiar.

“Great Water Spirit! Please! I will do anything you ask for your tear! A little bit! Only a little bit!“

The Montmorency shaped Water Spirit didn’t answer anything to Saito, who was prostrating on his knees while pressing his head against the ground.

"I beg you! The most important person to me right now is in trouble! Don‘t you have someone important to you as well? My important person right now needs help... and for that, a part of your body is needed! Therefore, please! Look!“

Hearing this Montmorency stopped trying to pull Saito away and let out a deep sigh. Guiche, who was moved to tears already, nodded. Louise, feeling insecure, kept on clinging to Saito.

The Water Spirit changed her appearance few times before taking Montmorency’s shape again, and said to Saito,

“Very well.”

“Yes! Really?”

“But with one condition. As a mere human that doesn’t know the reason of this world, you said that you would do anything?”

“Yes! That's what I said!”

“Then repel those that attack me, your comrades.”

They looked at each other.

“Repel?”

“Yes, I have raised the water level as far as I could. I no longer have the energy to fight them. If you can fight them off, I will bestow unto you my tear.”

“No, I hate fights.”

Saito put his hand on Montmorency's shoulder and patted it.

"You want to eat prison food instead?" Saito once again threatened Montmorency about the forbidden potion and she, like the day before, could not help but to give in.

“I know, alright! I’ll do it!”

So it was decided that they needed to discover the identities of the people attacking the Water Spirit.

The place where the Water Spirit lived was at the very bottom of the lake. Someone, using magic, had attacked her there in the middle of the night.

Saito and the others hid themselves in the shade of the tree on the shore at Gallia’s side, a place that the Water Spirit had shown them, and then waited quietly for the assailants to come.

Guiche, to cheer himself up before the battle, took a sip from the wine that Saito

had brought. When all of his anxiety was gone he started to sing. Saito pushed his head aside.

Louise was in an extremely bad mood because Saito was talking only to Montmorency.

*"Why is he nicer with Montmorency than with me? Does he love her? Or maybe he just hates me? waah waah"* This thought came with an angry cry from Louise.

With her roaring around like that Saito was forced to kiss her cheek many times to calm her down and put her to sleep. After that she slept calmly next to him, breathing softly with a blanket wrapped up around her. It was easy to guess that anyone would be like that if a potion made them fall madly in love.

Saito asked Montmorency “The people that attacked the Water Spirit went to the bottom of the lake. How can they breathe under the water?”

Montmorency thought for a while.

“Maybe it’s a water element user? With a ball of air created around the user it’s not that hard to get to the bottom of the lake. At the same time, even if you use water magic and are able to breathe underwater, directly touching the water would be suicidal as the Water Spirit controls it here. So maybe it was an air element mage, that way one can avoid touching the water.

According to the Water Spirit, she was attacked every night on a regular basis, having bits of her body cut off. "

“But how could someone wound it and still go unnoticed?”

“The Water Spirit's movements are slow… Besides, if you separate the Water Spirit from her source of water, her magic will eventually wear out. Using a strong flame would make her evaporate gradually as well. It becomes impossible to change it back into a liquid again after being turned into gas.”

“It is impossible to turn back?”

“The Water Spirit's soul is like moss. Even being torn to pieces it can reconnect itself into one again, as long as it has all the pieces. It is a really complicated

creature compared to us.”

“Hmmm…” Saito nodded.

“And because the attacker is not touching the water, the Water Spirit cannot reach him.”

“Then it is not that powerful at all.”

“Really… You do not know how scary the Water Spirit can be… Even if for a single moment one lost concentration and the air ball disappeared allowing the water to connect – then it would be dreadful. Water controls the lives of all creatures, if you lose the protection of an air ball, then you would enter the Water Spirit’s territory where challenging her is something that even the greatest daredevil would not do.”

Saito sighed. Really, Halkeginia was filled with creatures that in the past he could not have even imagined.

Two moons were shining high above in the sky. It was midnight.

Saito shut his mouth and with one hand withdrew Derflinger, that was hanging on his back , out.

Montmorency, scared by the sudden tension, muttered in a shaky voice.

“Anyhow, because I hate savage fights, I’ll leave it all up to you.”

Guiche, who obviously drank too much wine, started leaning towards Montmorency “Don’t worry Montmorency. I'm here. I will bravely protect the maiden from war and punish the villain.”

“Listen, just go to sleep already. You reek of alcohol.”

“Guiche, be a decoy.” Guiche nodded red-faced.

Saito took a deep breath. The fighter’s intuition that he gained from experiencing many fights was now telling him that someone was near. His mouth was filled with saliva. *I'm guessing that that someone is an enemy? But, will it be all right? I'm the legendary Gandálfr. I should be able to beat mages up. Did it matter a lot*

*against the dragon knights that attacked me before?*

Unnoticed to himself, Saito had become very self-conceited.

He gazed at Louise’s sleeping face and muttered silently *Wait for me, I will definitely bring you back,*

One hour passed after that, then suddenly shadows appeared on the shore. It was from two people. With their hooded robes it was hard to tell if they were men or women.

Saito gripped Derflinger's handle. The rune on his left hand began to shine. However, he hadn’t left the hiding spot. He still could not decide whether it was these people that attacked the Water Spirit or not.

Then the pair pulled out their wands while standing at the waterside.

It looked like they started chanting spells.

Convinced that there was no mistake by now, Saito stood up from the shade of the tree and moved towards the pair. *Two people should be an easy match. Because I already defeated Wardes and ten-times larger orc demons, and this is just a single pair. Hey, they are not even looking in my direction. Easy victory, easy victory, I could overpower them with a whistle.*

Saito hid himself behind the tree right next to the pair. Seeing him squatting himself down, Guiche started chanting the spell.

The ground where the pair stood suddenly rose and became a huge hand-like tentacle that twined around the assailants' feet.

Silence.

Saito dashed out of the shade of tree. The distance to the mages was about 30 meters. Saito, demonstrating Gandálfr's power, closed the distance in less than three seconds.

However, the enemy’s reaction was quick. The assailants started muttering spells the same time when the ground was raised. The flame flew out of the end of the wand, burning down the soil that was gripping the pair’s feet. The smaller shadow acted in a surprising manner. Instead of releasing their spell towards Guiche, the person aimed it towards Saito, who wasn't prepared for this.

The shadow turned around quickly and then swung the wand. Just like in the fight with Wardes before, an air hammer hit Saito’s body. Saito, who had not expected such an attack, took a direct hit and was easily blown away.

In no time, an ice arrow followed. Saito turned his body and jumped up, dodging it, but the taller mage shot a big fire ball at him. Though Saito tried to dodge that too, the aiming was too accurate since Saito’s movements were anticipated beforehand.

“Partner! Raise me!” Derflinger shouted.

Saito boldly blocked the flame ball with his sword, and yet even though it was absorbed into the sword, it still exploded, scattering around fragments of fire.

Saito looked confused and was petrified.

Though he frantically tried to rub the pain away, his eyes still hurt since sparks had entered his eyes. Saito became more panicked. *Crap! Their wands.*

He lowered his guard thinking that the enemy would concentrate on Guiche.

The enemy was experienced in combat and anticipated an attack from a different direction, not being surprised in the slightest by the ambush.

Moreover, they worked together skillfully. While one was preparing the spell, the other was releasing it. Though this was a simple tactic, the results were very effective. Anyhow, there was no opening.

Raging winds snatched the sword out of the hands of the petrified Saito.

His body suddenly felt heavy. In the corner of his eyes he could see another huge fireball coming his way. Saito gave up. His momentary arrogance quickly vanished.

*Aah, I am an amateur after all. Gandálfr's power gave me more confidence than my actual skills were worth. Being straightforward doesn't work on all enemies! Aah, Louise, sorry! Louise!*

However even now the goddess of fate did not desert Saito.

The moment before the fireball knocked against Saito, the area in front of him exploded. The fireball and Saito were blown off. This magic was… Louise's 'Void'!

"Don't bully Saitooo!"

Louise's scream echoed through the night. It almost made Saito cry. *Louise helped me. Though she was asleep… but she was probably woken up by all this noise.*

Louise waited for an attack, but their guard was off now. Thus, Saito could now recover. Somehow, he wrenched his right eye open and picked up Derflinger.

He was about to burst into another attack…

But the pair stopped moving. Louise's scream made them realize something. The two shadows looked at each other.

And removed their hoods.

The faces that appeared in the moonlight were…

"Kirche! Tabitha!" Guiche shouted loudly.

"What?! It was you?!"

Feeling relieved, Saito collapsed on to the ground, exhausted.

Surprised, Kirche shouted as well."You? Why, darling?!"

# Chapter Seven: The Ring of Andvari

Saito, who had his eye healed by Montmorency's Water spell, had begun questioning Kirche, who was roasting meat with Tabitha around a bonfire. Guiche appeared to be completely content and had been talking loudly to himself with a glass of wine in his hand. He seemed only too content to be traveling. It was well past midnight, and the twin moons glittered beautifully over the surface of the lake. It was a wonderful sight.

Kirche approached Saito asking if his wound had recovered. Though Saito felt slightly bitter about being defeated, he could not help but admire both their team work.

"You are really good, we stood no chance."

"Victory or defeat is also dependent on luck. If your luck were better, we could only have run. Besides, you were fighting alone, Guiche was useless, Montmorency was only watching and Louise only dealt the final blow."

Kirche proudly brushed up her hair.

"But why are you attacking the Water Spirit?" Saito asked, sitting near the bonfire.

"Why do you need to protect it?" Kirche countered.

Louise, who had been nestling up to Saito's back for some time, pulled the sleeve of his parka sadly.

"Do you think Kirche is better than me?"

"Ah! No - that's not true! I was just asking about what's going on! Why don't you get some sleep?"

"No way, I don't need to rest! Don't you want to talk with me? That is the 32nd time you've told me to sleep today."

It seemed as if Louise had been counting the words Saito had said to her. Although a little scary, Saito felt that Louise was really lovable at that moment. But right now he was busy so he gently placed his hand on her shoulder and spoke as if she was a small child: "We can talk afterwards, you should go to sleep. You just cast a major spell, aren't you tired?"

Louise was bashfully tracing circles with her finger on Saito's chest.

"Then... promise me with a kiss."

"What...?"

"Kiss me or I won't go to sleep."

Kirche's stared at them, her mouth agape. Looking at each other, Guiche and Montmorency giggled. Kirche and Tabitha were still unaware of what had happened.

Saito reluctantly kissed Louise's cheek.

"Cheek isn't enough!"

Louise puffed up her cheeks and muttered bluntly.

Saito felt extremely awkward, it would be too embarrassing to kiss Louise straight on the lips with everyone watching. He worried for a while and finally kissed her forehead. Louise was reluctantly satisfied, and crawled into his lap, resting herself between his knees and pressing her body against his chest she closed her eyes. Soon her breathing slowed and light snores escaped from her slightly open pink lips.

"How did you manage to domesticate Louise to this degree? I didn't think you were the kind of guy who was able to entice a girl, yet she is already treating you like a god!" Kirche asked in admiration.

"It's not like that, Montmorency made a love potion and Louise accidentally drank it. The first person she saw was me and now she has fallen in love with

me."

"Love potion? Why did you make such a thing?" Kirche asked Montmorency, who was nibbling some meat.

"Oh, I was just curious to see if I could do it."

Montmorency had sidestepped the question with a trivial answer...

"Really, a woman who has no confidence in her charms is the worst. Don't you agree?"

"Go die! Anyways, it's all Guiche's fault, if he had drunk it we would not need to search for the antidote now!"

"Are you saying it's my fault to begin with?"

Saito explained the situation to Kirche. In order to make the antidote, they needed the Water Spirit's tears. And in exchange for it they needed to repel the attackers...

"So that was it, that's why you are protecting the Water Spirit?"

Kirche looked awkwardly towards Tabitha who had been staring into the fire with a glazed expression.

"This is bad; we can't fight you, but if we don't stop the Water Spirit, Tabitha's family will be in trouble..."

"Why is it necessary to get rid of it?"

Prompted by Saito, Kirche replied hesitantly. She could not openly tell the private matters of Tabitha's family for sure.

"You see, the water levels have caused damage to the surrounding area. Tabitha's family has suffered losses because of the damage so we have been entrusted to get rid of it."

So that was it. They couldn't go home empty handed. Then how should they handle it... Saito considered it for a while and concluded.

"That's fine, you can stop attacking the Water Spirit and we can find out why the Water Spirit is raising the water level so much and ask it to stop."

"The Water Spirit will listen to us?"

"This morning we negotiated with it and it agreed to give us a part of its body if we stop the attackers."

Kirche considered for a second and asked Tabitha, "As long as the floods stop and the land is restored to its original condition would that be ok?"

Tabitha nodded.

"Great, it's decided! We can carry out the negotiations tomorrow!"

Early the next morning, Montmorency, like the previous day, released her small frog familar into the lake to call the Water Spirit. The water parted and the Water Spirit rose up through the morning mist.

"Water Spirit, the attackers will no longer bother you, as per the agreement will you give us a part of your body?"

As Montmorency finished talking, the Water Spirit's body trembled and a portion of its body was repelled as a thin line into the vial Guiche was holding.

Its promise completed, the Water Spirit sunk back towards the lake, however Saito quickly called for it to stop.

"Please wait! I have something to ask you!"

The Water Spirit rose up from the water's surface, taking, to Montmorency's displeasure, a naked Montmorency's shape once again.

"What, mere human?"

"Why have you raised the water? Please, if there is a reason can you tell us? We would be willing to help if you can stop."

The Water Spirit's body grew in size and assumed various positions. It concluded by twisting its form into that of Montmorency in a gesture that seemed to express feeling. Perhaps its form reflected its thoughts.

"I will consider entrusting this task to you. Since you honored our previous contract, I think I can trust you."

Suddenly seeming angry, the Water Spirit paused. Saito said nothing, but waited for the spirit to continue. After several shape changes, the Water Spirit had settled once again in Montmorency's form and continued to speak.

"A long time ago, your kind stole one of my treasures."

"A treasure?"

"Yes, my most important possession was stolen from the deepest part of my lake, about thirty months before the moon's crossing."

"Approximately two years ago..." Montmorency murmurs.

"Are you trying to take revenge on humans by increasing the water level and flooding villages?"

"Vengeance? Our kind does not have that purpose. I am simply trying to retake my treasure, and even if it takes an eternity water will slowly erode the land. Even if I must sink the entire continent I will regain what I have lost."

"You're willing to do so much?"

This was going too far, the Water Spirit was willing to submerge an entire continent in order to reclaim its treasure in a process that could take hundreds, even thousands of years.

"You sure are patient."

"Our concept of time is different, for me the whole is the same as the present. All time is the same to me, regardless of the present the future will always come. It makes no difference as I will always exist."

The Water Spirit did not seem to have the concept of death. Time on this scale

would be unimaginable to a human.

"Well, we can help you retrieve your treasure. What is it?"

"My treasure is the Ring of Andvari, it had been with me until now."

"I think I have heard of it."

Montmorency muttered.

"A legendary magic item of the water system. It is said to give false life to the deceased..."

"That is not incorrect, but death is a concept that I do not understand, therefore I cannot understand your description. The Ring of Andvari does not simply bring false life, it is the embodiment of the ancient "Strength of the Water", it is not simply a magical item."

"Then who stole such a thing?"

"Using wind magic, several humans came into my dwelling. They did not disturb me in my slumber and took away my most prized possession."

"So you don't know their names?"

"One of the people went by the name Cromwell."

Kirche said to herself, "If I haven't misunderstood, he is the new Emperor of Albion."

Everyone but Saito could not help but look at each other in dismay.

"Could he be a different person? There could be two people with the same name... If he has gained the power of false life, what will he use it for?"

"Those who are revived have their freedom stolen. They must obey the owner of the ring."

"It is a truly evil ring, animating the dead is a disgusting power." Kirche said in a low voice.

Kirche continued to mutter to herself, she felt as if she should have remembered something but couldn't grasp the thought.

Saito nodded with a firm resolution, and turned towards the Water Spirit.

"I understand. Please stop raising the water level and I guarantee you I will return your ring."

The Water Spirit vibrated.

"I believe you, if you can bring back the ring I will no longer raise the water."

"Then when should I bring it back to you?"

This time the Water Spirit shook and trembled.

"Before your life ends, otherwise I am unconcerned."

"You don't mind such a long time?"

"I don't care, to me tomorrow is no different from any other part of the future." After saying this, the Water Spirit returned to the depths of the lake.

In that flash, Tabitha stopped it by calling out.

"Please wait."

Everyone stared at Tabitha in surprise. Although she had been with them all this time, this was the first time she had spoken out.

"Water Spirit, I wish to ask you something."

"What is your question?"

"We humans have always called you the "Spirit of Oath', I would like to know the reason."

"Mere human, my and your existence are completely dissimilar. I cannot understand your question completely, but I can speculate. My existence in itself is the reason for this name. I do not have a fixed shape, yet I will never change. For uncountable generations I have always been here with the water."

The Water Spirit, trembling, spoke. The sound rang in the air.

"Because you are eternally unchanging, therefore you will forever carry our hopes."

Tabitha nodded, then shut her eyes. In the end, who had she made an oath to? Kirche gently put a hand on her shoulder.

Montmorency, having seen such Tabitha's appearance, immediately poked Guiche.

"What?"

"Quickly, make an oath too."

"What oath?"

"What did you think I made the Love potion for anyways?"

"Mmm! Ah... I swear that I will consider Montmorency above all others from this point forward..."

She poked Guiche again.

"Oww... Ah...! Really! I swear!"

"I don't want to be above others, I want to be the only. Swear you love only me!"

Guiche forced sad words out in a tone that most people would find hard to believe.

"I swear..."

Louise had also pulled on Saito's sleeve, her eyes were gazing up at him.

"You too - swear to me."

Saito looked into Louise's face. Today he must tell this Louise goodbye and he couldn't help but feel somewhat lonely. Even though it was only because of the Love potion, how many times had she told him that she loved him?

But Saito preferred the original Louise. Even if he was beaten by her and treated like a dog, he thought the original was better.

"You are not willing to swear to me? You don't love me?"

Tears filled Louise's eyes.

"Sorry... I cannot swear to you... I cannot make a promise to you the way you are."

When Saito said this, she began to cry. Saito gently stroked her head.

# Chapter Eight: Reunion with Falsehood

Henrietta, nearly naked, was lying on her bed. The only thing she was wearing was a thin chemise. The room she was in belonged to her father, the deceased King, but she had begun to use it after becoming Queen.

Beside the enormous canopy-included bed was her father's favorite table. She quietly reached out with her hand and took the bottle of wine. Pouring it in her cup, she drank it all down in one gulp. Before, she lightly drank alcohol when she ate... but after becoming Queen, the amount she drank had increased.

To Henrietta, who was nothing but a flower ornament for the government, being asked for decisions was something she felt anxious about. Most resolutions were brought to her in a decided state, but even so, the one who gave approval of those was her. What was more, even though a state of reduced activity was being kept, the war was still going on.

Even though she was just an ornamental ruler, numerous responsibilities for her had already occurred. Henrietta was still handling that pressure. She couldn't sleep without drinking. She couldn't show this to her attendant court ladies or chamberlains, so she drank the hidden wine in the dead of night. Once again, she poured wine into her cup. *I might have drank too much*. She thought drowsily through her intoxication. She quietly chanted a rune and swung it down at the cup she had poured wine in.

Water overflowed from the tip of her wand and filled the cup. It was a spell to return water vapor in the air back into a fluid. It is a rudimentary spell of the Water-element.

The water overflowed and spilled out of the cup. Possibly because of her drunkenness, she couldn't control the amount she poured. She drank it all.

Henrietta, whose cheeks were dyed pink in color, fell on her bed once again.

When she was drunk, what she remembered was... the fun days. The glittering days.

The few times where she actually felt she was alive.

The short time of the summer when she was fourteen years-old.

The words she wanted to hear just once...

"Why did you not say it at that time?"

Henrietta asked, covering her face with her hands.

But, the person who would say it is no longer here. Nowhere in this world.

She felt that victory might heal sadness.

She thought that the exhausting work of a queen might let her forget about it.

However, she couldn't forget. Brilliant victories, words of praise, the shouts of the people who respect and love her for being a saint... cannot match just one word.

She unconsciously shed tears. *Oh no*, she thought. *Tomorrow's morning will be early. There are negotiations with Germania's ambassador.* To Tristain and Henrietta who wanted to end this foolish war as soon as possible, it was an important negotiation. *I can't show them my face wet with tears. I can no longer show my weak side to anyone anymore.*

She wiped her tears. And when she reached out for her wine cup again...

There was a knock at the door.

*Who could it be so late at night? Did something troublesome come up again? It's annoying, but I can't ignore it. Albion might have dispatched their armada again.*

Henrietta put on her gown in a weary manner and asked from her bed.

"La Porte? Or are you the Cardinal? What's wrong, in this dead of the night?"

However, there was no reply. In exchange, there was another knock. *If it isn't the Grand Chamberlain or Cardinal, then just who is it?*

"Who is it? Identify yourself. For people who visit the Queen's room so late at night, there is no way one cannot name themselves. Now, speak. Otherwise, I will call someone."

"It's me."

The moment those words entered her ears, Henrietta's facial expression disappeared.

"It seems I drank too much. This isn't good, to hear such hallucinations so clearly..."

Murmuring that, she placed her hands on her chest. But, the intense palpitation of her heart would not stop.

"It's me."

"It's me, Henrietta. Open this door."

Henrietta rushed over to the door.

"Prince Wales? No way. You should have died by a traitor's hands..."

In a trembling voice, she said that.

"That's a mistake. And I, am alive."

"That's a lie. A lie. How?"

"I had run away. The one that died... was my impersonator."

"That... Even though, the Ruby of Wind is..."

Henrietta checked the ring, a memento of Wales, that was on her finger.

"To deceive the enemy, you have to start with your allies, right? Well, it is

understandable that you do not believe me. Then, I will let you hear the proof that I am me."

While trembling, Henrietta waited for Wales's words.

"In the night when wind blows."

The watchword she heard often at Ragdorian Lake.

Forgetting to even answer, Henrietta threw open the door.

The smile she had dreamed of many times stood there.

"Ooh, Prince Wales... You really are safe..."

What followed could not become words. Henrietta tightly hugged Wales's chest, and she placed her face there and sobbed.

Wales tenderly petted her head.

"You are the same as always, Henrietta. What a crybaby."

"That's because, I had completely thought you were dead... Why did you not visit sooner?"

"After losing, I escaped on a cruiser. I was hiding in Tristain's forest the whole time. I could not have the enemy finding my whereabouts, so I changed my location many times. I came to the lands of the castle you live in two days ago... It took time to investigate on when you would be alone. There is no way I could just stand in the waiting room as an audience in the daytime, right?"

Saying that, Wales smiled teasingly.

"As always, you are so mean. You don't understand... how much I grieved... how lonely I felt."

"I understand. That is why I came to see you."

For a while, Henrietta and Wales embraced each other.

"You can come to this castle as much as you want. Albion does not have the

power to invade Tristain right now. After all, their reliable armada is gone. This castle is the safest place in Halkeginia. The enemy can not lay a single finger on you."

"It can not be like that."

Wales smiled cheerfully.

"What do you plan to do?"

"I have to return to Albion."

"What a stupid thing! That is like pointlessly going to throw away the life you barely managed to keep!"

"Even so, I have to return. I have to liberate Albion from Reconquista's hands."

"What a joke!"

"It isn't a joke. For that reason, I came to meet you."

"Me?"

"Your powers are necessary in order to liberate Albion. There are cooperators in the country as well, but... Even more, I need a person I can trust. You will come with me, right?"

"No way... I am happy for those words, but that is impossible. I could have gone on such adventures when I was a princess, but I am now a queen. Whether I like it or not, the country and the people are placed on my shoulders. Please do not say such impossible things."

However, Wales would not give up. With even more zealous words, he tried to convince Henrietta. "I know it is impossible. But, you are necessary for victory. In the middle of that lost battle, I realized it. About just how much I needed you. I need the "Saint" who will bring victory upon me and Albion."

Henrietta felt something hot welling inside her body. She was needed by her beloved person. Drunkenness and loneliness accelerated the urge welling inside her.

Even so, Henrietta desperately answered.

"Do not trouble me any more. Please wait, I will have people come and prepare a bed for you. Tomorrow, again, we can discuss this topic, slowly..."

Wales shook his head.

"We won't make it in time tomorrow."

Then, Wales easily said the words Henrietta had always wanted to hear.

"I love you, Henrietta. That's why, come with me."

Henrietta's heart started beating in the same rhythm as the times where she and Wales rendezvoused at Ragdorian Lake.

Slowly, Wales drew his lips near Henrietta. To Henrietta's lips that tried to say something, Wales' sealed it up.

In Henrietta's mind, she recalled all kinds of sweet memories.

Because of that, Henrietta did not notice the sleeping magic cast on her.

Still feeling happy, Henrietta fell into the world of sleep.

Meanwhile, at the same time...

In one of the rooms in the girls' dormitory at Tristain's Academy of Magic, Montmorency was trying her very best at mixing something while Saito and the others watched her.

"Done! Fuu! Still, that really was difficult!"

While wiping the sweat from her forehead, Montmorency flopped onto her chair.

Inside the pot on top of the table was the cancellation drug that she just mixed.

"It's fine to just drink it like this?"

"Yes."

Taking the pot, Saito brought it to the tip of Louise's nose. Louise grimaced from the smell.

"Well then, Louise. Drink this."

"No. It stinks really badly."

Louise shook her head. *Crap, I should have mixed it with something and have her secretly drink it. In order to have children eat carrots, you chop it and mix it into a hamburger.*

"Please. Drink this."

"If I drink this, will you kiss me?"

Saito nodded, realizing he had no other choice.

"Got it. If you drink this, I'll kiss you."

Louise answered, "I understand", and took the pot.

She looked at the contents with a disgusted expression for a while, but she closed her eyes resolutely and drank it all. Montmorency, observing this, poked Saito.

"For now, shouldn't it be best if you run away?"

"Why?"

"Because the memories of the time when she was madly in love with you after drinking the love potion don't disappear. She remembers everything. That Louise remembers everything she did and was done to her."

Saito flinched in shock and looked at Louise.

"Buhwa!" went Louise who drank the whole thing, and then she hiccupped once.

"Funya."

After that, as if an evil spirit had left her, her facial expression completely returned back to normal. Seeing Saito in front of her, her face suddenly turned red. Chewing on her lips, she started trembling.

Saito muttered, "Oh god," and tried to sneak out of the place.

"Wait."

"Sorry, but food for my pigeon..."

"You don't even keep a pigeonnnnnnnnn!!!!"

Louise's voice resounded. *This is bad. I'm going to be killed.*

Saito opened the door and ran down the stairs as if he was tumbling down.

However, the present Louise moved at lightning speed.

Jumping from the landing of the staircase, she aimed a kick downstairs at Saito's back. Saito somersaulted, rolled down to the first floor, and struck the floor severely.

Suitably, it was the entranceway of the girls' dormitory. He tried to escape by crawling, but, as usual, the scruff of his neck was firmly stepped on by her foot.

“I, I didn’t do anything wrong! It couldn’t be helped! It was that drug’s fault! We were both unhappy!”

Without answering back, Louise pulled up his parka. Then she lifted his t-shirt. Finding a lot more kiss marks, her face got even redder. She made these herself. *This is, this is-this is... For me to do such a thing...* She traced the back of her neck with her finger. The same mark made by Saito was there.

With shyness and anger at herself mixed, Louise’s reasoning snapped. In the end, the thing that received her unreasonable anger was Saito’s body. Saito’s screams sounded into the air.

On a bench in Austri Plaza, Saito was laying on it limply. He was hurt to the point of dying, and was half dead. He occasionally twitched, so he wasn't dead. Beside him was the finally calmed-down Louise, sitting on the edge of the bench, who was blushing and thinking about something while pursing her lips out as if she was angry.

The two moons had risen and were shining on the two gently. However, the atmosphere running around the two was far from gentle and was awkward, hot, and numbing. In other words, the atmosphere between the two had returned to normal.

"Do you feel satisfied now?"

Saito muttered.

"I-if I had been normal, I definitely wouldn't have done something like that! Really! Hmph!"

"I know that."

Saito muttered in an exhausted voice. By that time, finally, Louise realized that it was not Saito's fault at all. Even so, he let Louise do what she did and received her outrage. *His cheeks are swollen. Is he okay?* Despite inflicting the wounds herself, she was impelled to take care of him. But… It really was embarrassing. The memories of the moments after she drank the love potion kept her from approaching Saito.

*But why did this familiar just let himself get hit, I wonder?*

"You are you too. You didn't have to be obedient and get hit by me until you ended up in such a state, right? Sheesh! Resist a little! I went too far, you know!"

"…It's fine."

Saito muttered in an exhausted voice.

"Why is that?"

“…Because if I did so, you wouldn’t feel satisfied, right? I understand how you feel. After all, you followed a guy you don’t even like around so closely, and you even did *those things* and *these things*. For someone so prideful like you, there’s no way you could forgive it, right? And still, looking back, I have a little responsibility for angering you… Anyways, don’t worry about it.”

*Well, aren’t those kind words. Even though I hurt him so much.* It came to her firmly.

But, the words that came out were the opposite.

“I-I’m not worrying about it. Really I just want to hurry and forget.”

*Haa, why can’t I be honest?* She thought. Then, Louise asked about one thing that was bothering her.

“Hey, can I ask you something?”

“About what?”

“When I was, well, in a state where I couldn’t live without you thanks to that drug… why didn’t you, um, d-d-do anything?”

Saito answered frankly.

“That’s because, that wasn’t you. I can’t do something to you when you aren’t you. I can’t leave myself to lust and defile a person important to me.”

Being told she was important, Louise blushed. However, she couldn’t show him such a face. Louise turned her face away. But, she was really bothered. *Why am I important? Hey… why?*

“Wh-wh, why am I important?”

She asked in a trembling voice.

“Well, you provide food and a place to sleep.”

"Haa..." She felt disappointed. *Well, that makes sense. I'm embarrassed I even got excited for a moment.* Louise had turned her face from Saito, so she didn't

realize he had purposely said that while blushing.

*Still, he's a familiar that still calls me, his master, "important" after being hurt so much.* Becoming a bit more honest, Louise apologized in a pouting manner.

"...I'm sorry. I won't get angry anymore. You have the right to do stuff freely too."

To be truthful, she didn't want to say this. She remembered the time when the love potion was in effect. Those might have been her own true intentions, she thought.

"It's fine. You aren't you if you don't get mad. Do what you want."

Then, the two fell silent.

Unable to endure that atmosphere, Louise ended up changing the topic.

"Haa, still, how nostalgic... That Ragdorian Lake."

"You've gone there before?"

"Eeh. When I was thirteen. There were occasions where I accompanied the Princess. An extremely grand garden party was opened... It was really lively and showy. It was fun."

Louise pulled at the bottom of her memories and began to talk.

"You know, that Ragdorian Lake was where Prince Wales and the Princess met. In the dead of night, the Princess told me 'I want to go out for a walk, so I need to sneak out of bed. I'm very sorry, but Louise, can you lay in the bed in my place?' and I acted as her substitute. Thinking about it now, that might have been when the two rendezvoused."

When Louise said that, a loud voice sounded from behind the bench. From the mole-dug hole Louise once used to watch over Siesta and Saito, Kirche's red hair poked out. Tabitha was beside her.

"That's it! I remember now! It was Prince Wales!"

"Wh-what are you talking about?!"

"What! You two were eavesdropping?"

"Ehehe," Kirche crawled out of the hole while grinning.

"Iyaah, I wanted to see you two reconcile with each other... The melodrama after you hit him so much. Doesn't that seem interesting?"

"Like hell it would."

Saito and Louise blushed. Kirche came up to the bench while nodding.

"That's right. I thought I saw his face somewhere before. Iyaah, so that's how it is. That was Albion's lady-killer, Prince Wales."

Kirche had seen his face before during Germania's Emperor Inauguration Ceremony. At that time, he was sitting in a guest seat, brandishing his noble and charming smile around him.

She finally remembered just now, so Kirche was satisfied.

“What do you mean by ‘That was Prince Wales’?”

Kirche explained to Saito and Louise. How they passed a group of people riding on horses while heading towards Ragdorian Lake. How she remembered seeing that face somewhere before but couldn’t remember very well.

"But, I remember now. That was Prince Wales. There was an announcement that he died in battle, but he was alive."

"That's impossible! That prince should have died! I was there to see it myself!"

Kirche did not see Prince Wales die, so she had not actually felt his death firsthand. Therefore, she asked Saito in a joking manner.

"Oh? Is that so? Then, who did I see?"

"Didn't you mistake him for someone else?"

"There's no way I could mistake that handsome guy for someone else."

At that moment, something connected inside Saito's head. It seemed that was the same for Louise. The two looked at each other. The words that the Water Spirit said... There was a peculiar man named "Cromwell" in the group who stole the Ring of Andvari.

"The Ring of Andvari... So, Reconquista really did..."

"Hey, Kirche. Where was that group heading?"

Louise asked out of breath. Being pressured by the two's serious attitudes, Kirche answered.

"He passed us, so, let's see, towards the capital city, Tristain."

Louise ran off. Saito also chased after her.

"Wait! What's going on?!"

Kirche was flustered.

"The Princess is in trouble!"

"Why─?"

Kirche and Tabitha did not know about Wales and Henrietta's secret relationship, so they did not understand the meaning behind those words. But, bothered by Saito and Louise's unusual actions, Kirche and Tabitha followed them.

# Chapter Nine: Confrontation of Sadness

Riding Tabitha‘s wind dragon, Saito, Louise, Kirche and Tabitha herself flew towards the royal palace, having left the Academy of Magic two hours ago. It was one hour after midnight.

The courtyard was in an uproar. Louise and Saito felt that their bad premonitions had come true. When the wind-dragon landed in the courtyard, it was instantly surrounded by the magic guardian troops.

The commander of Manticore Corps, loudly ordered.

“Hey you! The royal palace is off-limits now! Leave!”

However, he already recognized the group from sight. They were the same that came here right before the war against Albion started. The commander puckered up his brows.

“You again! You only come at troublesome times!”

Louise jumped down from a wind dragon. She had no time to play games of questions and answers with the captain of the guard. She asked in a breathless haste.

“Princess-sama! No, Her Majesty, is she alright?!”

The courtyard was humming like a beehive. Nobles carrying shining magical wands and soldiers holding torches were looking for something. It was clear that something had happened in the royal palace.

“I don’t have to tell any of you anything. Leave at once.”

Her face red with anger, Louise pulled out something from her pocket. It was the permit paper that Henrietta gave to Louise before.

“I am a court lady who is under immediate control of Her Majesty! In my hand I hold the permit papers signed by the Queen! I have the right to exercise Her Majesty's jurisdiction! I request an immediate explanation of the circumstances!“

The commander grabbed the permit papers from Louise's hands with blank surprise all over his face. They were indeed authentic permit papers signed by Henrietta that read - ‘Louise Françoise Le Blanc De La Vallière is presented with the right of being a royal representative. Her demands must be granted.” With the royal signature attached.

The commander stared with astonishment at Louise. Such a young girl… had such a document from Her Majesty.

He was a serviceman though. No matter how one looked, a superior officer was still a superior officer. Standing upright at once, he reported the situation concerning Her Majesty.

“Two hours ago, someone enticed Her Majesty away. One of the guards was knocked down as they escaped with horses. The griffon squad is chasing after them. We were searching around here to find some evidence.”

Louise's complexion changed.

“Which way did they leave?”

“They went south over the highway. Apparently they escaped towards the district of La Rochelle. Without a doubt, Albion has a hand to this. Though the instruction to block the port was sent at once… Dragon Knight corps were almost annihilated in the last war. So the only way we can catch up with them are either by griffons or horses…”

Wind dragons are much lighter than griffons thus they normally would take the pursuit… but the way things were now - it was questionable whether it was possible to catch up. Louise jumped onto the wind dragon again.

“Hurry! The thief who kidnapped princess-sama escaped towards La Rochelle! We will be in serious trouble if we aren't able to catch up by the time the

morning dawns!”

Everyone, hearing the circumstances, nodded, looking tense. Tabitha gave the orders to the wind dragon.

Sylphid flew up in the darkness of the night again. Louise shouted.

“Fly low! The enemy is riding a horse!”

The wind dragon kept on flying following the highway with a surprising swiftness.

It was a thick dark night, but even though one could not see even few steps ahead, the wind dragon kept on flying using its sharp nose, avoiding trees and buildings.

The griffon unit had split into two, one flew by griffon along the highway, the other rode on horses. It was to be expected as the Griffon Corps was the lightest of the three squads and they could see better at night. Therefore, it was chosen as the chasing unit. A lot of people in the squad were burning with anger. The enemy attacked the court under the cover of darkness. Even in their wildest dreams one could not imagine that someone would dare to attack the palace of the capital. Moreover, it was young queen Henrietta that was abducted, a successor of the throne. For magic knights that have been guardians of royal family there could not be a greater disgrace than this.

Griffons taking use of their wings and feet rushed forwards. Though the departure was delayed due to all the confusion, the enemy was still using horses. There was no reason they should not be able to catch up. The commander scolded the unit harshly.

“Run! Catch up with Her Majesty as soon as possible!”

One group of the Griffon unit dashed forward.

There was a big hustle between the Griffon units going ahead.

They might have found something. Under the commander's signal, a fire user went forward and launched a flame spell. It lit the highway 100 mails ahead, and one could see distant figures of the riders.

There were ten times as many of them.

The commander put on a brutal smile.

"First of all aim for the horses! Do not hurt Her Majesty!"

The Griffon Corps dashed forwards, launching one spell after another.

After the wall of spells rounded upon the enemies, the knights launched an attack in an instant.

The flame ball, the blade of wind, the spear of ice, all were aimed at the horses that the enemies rode on. Doh! The earth trembled, making horses fall one after another. The commander confirmed that Queen Henrietta, dressed in her white gown, was riding behind the first horse. In an emergency situation like this, he hesitated – it was necessary to retrieve Her Majesty without injuries. If she were to be injured, he would get some major scolding later.

After muttering an apology, the commander cast the wind spell, cutting the leg of the first horse off and throwing the Princess and the rider down to the ground.

Without mercy, the griffon squad surrounded the fallen enemy knights. The necks of the abductors were cut with wind blades and ice spears went through their hearts. The knight who was leading the run had his head cut off by the commander's wind blade, a deadly wound.

The match was decided in a moment.

When the commander nodded approvingly, the unit stopped.

Then he jumped down from his griffon, and the moment he approached the queen who fell into the grass…

Knights, who should have been dead, stood up one after another.

Griffon knights, who had relaxed their guard thinking that enemy was

annihilated were now caught by surprise by enemy magic.

“Ah!” groaned the commander trying to pull out his wand when his body was wrapped up by tornado.

Limbs were cut off by the tornado, finishing them off in a moment, as the knight who should have been finished by the commander stood up, with a clearly visible torn up wound on his neck, and smiled.

When Wales finally placed the wand to his side he approached the grass where Henrietta had fallen down.

Henrietta only now started to recover from the shock of being thrown to the grass. She watched Wales approach with disbelieving eyes.

"Wales-sama, you… what on earth?”

“Surprised?”

Henrietta pulled out her crystal wand that she always carried with herself and aimed it at Wales.

“Who are you?”

“I am Wales.”

“Lies! You killed the magical knight corps…”

“You want to kill me? It is all right. Scoop me out with your magic. Pierce this heart of mine with it if you want.”

Wales pointed at his chest. The hand gripping Henrietta’s wand started to tremble.

The magic spell did not come out of her mouth. What came instead was a choked sob.

“Why are you doing this?”

“Trust me, Henrietta.”

“But… but, this…”

“I will tell the reasons later. Many different circumstances are the cause of this. For now, come with me without asking.”

“I-I do not understand. Why did you do these kind of things… What are you trying to do?”

Wales answered softly.

“You do not need to understand. You do not need to like that oath, you just need to follow it. Do you remember? The words of the oath you said at the Ragdorian lake. Words you said before the water spirit.”

“By no means could I forget. I will remember until the day I die.”

“Please say it, Henrietta.”

Henrietta said the oath word for word.

“...I, Henrietta, the princess of Tristain vows before the spirits of water that she will love Wales-sama for eternity.”

“Only one thing changed now from the oath in the past. You are a queen now. However, does everything else remain unchanged? And will not change?”

Henrietta nodded. *I always dreamt only about the day when Wales would hold me in his arms.*

“Even with the way things are, the oath sworn before the water spirit cannot be broken. You only have to believe in your own words. Please leave everything to me.”

Each gentle word of Wales turned Henrietta more and more into a girl that did not know a thing. Henrietta kept nodding many times, just like a child. She was completely persuaded.

After that, Wales stood up and approached his knights. One could see open mortal wounds on their throats or chests.

However… ignoring them, they moved just like any living creature.

They went to check the fallen horses, yet, they all were dead.

Then they hid themselves in the tall grass, one after another disappearing from sight.

This was the line of the ambush.

Without words they and Wales formed a line of ambush, and stopped moving. Just like one living creature.

Saito and the others flew on the wind dragon following the highway until they saw a tragic sight of corpses scattered around. The wind dragon stopped, and they jumped down. Not getting off, Tabitha looked around attentively.

“Princess.”

Saito muttered. Burning corpses with their hands and feet cut off were laying around. Griffons and horses were lying in pools of their own blood. This must have been the griffon unit.

“There’s someone alive!”

Saito and Louise ran towards Kirche’s voice.

Despite a deep wound in his arm, someone survived.

“Are you all right?”

Louise now regretted not taking Montmorency with them. In cases of wounds, her water magic would be irreplaceable.

“I’m alright… And you are?”

“We, just like you, ran after the gang that kidnapped Her Majesty. What on earth happened to you?”

The knight answered in a shaky voice.

“They, their wounds were really fatal…”

“What?”

However, the knight could not tell anything else. Feeling secure now that help had come, he fainted.

At that moment, a magical attack was unleashed from all directions. Tabitha reacted in an instant. Expecting an attack beforehand, she created a wall of air above and let it fly down with her magic.

Out of the grass, shadows stood up, swaying in slow motion.

They were once dead Albion nobles now revived by Andvari’s ring.

Kirche and Tabitha took a stance. However, for some reason, the enemy didn’t launch an attack any more. Tension started.

Then, Saito was astonished to find a well known shadow there.

“Crown Prince Wales!”

Still, he…

Wales, who was dead and was given a fake life from Cromwell using the Ring of Andvari that was stolen from the water spirit, had abducted Henrietta.

That was a cowardly act, Saito thought angrily.

He gripped Derflinger on his shoulder. The rune on his left hand started to shine.

“Return the princess.”

However, Wales didn't drop the smile.

“You are saying strong things. I cannot return her as she follows me on her own free will.”

“What?”

Behind Wales back, Henrietta, dressed in the gown, appeared.

“Princess!”

Louise shouted.

“Please do not go there! That prince Wales is not the real Wales! It is a revenant of the prince, revived by Cromwell’s hands with the Ring of Andvari!”

However, Henrietta didn't step forward. She just bit and tightened her shivering lips.

“…Princess?”

“See? Now then, how about a deal?”

“Deal?”

“That’s right. Though we would like to quarrel here with you, we lost our horses. And traveling without horses through the night can be dangerous, so I would like to save as much magic as possible.”

Tabitha chanted the spell.

‘Windy Icicle’ – an attack spell from the skillful Tabitha.

Right in the middle of his words the arrow of ice went through Wales’ body.

However… surprisingly, Wales did not fall down and the wound healed itself in another moment.

“It is useless. I cannot be damaged by your attacks.”

Yet, even after seeing this, Henrietta's expression did not change.

“Look! It is not the prince! It is something else! Princess!”

However, Henrietta did not want to believe, and shook her head from right to left, then said to Louise in a constrained voice.

“Please, Louise, put away the wand. Please do it for me. Please let us go.”

“Princess? What are you saying?! Princess! That thing is not Crown Prince Wales! Princess, you have been tricked!”

Henrietta gave a smile. A ghastly smile.

“I know that. In my room, when our lips met, I knew that 100 times over. However, still, I do not care. Louise, you haven’t loved a person so strongly yet. When you really are in love you are willing to throw away everything. You want to follow him anywhere. Even if it is a lie. You cannot do anything else but believe. I swore, Louise. I made an oath before the water spirit saying ‘I swear eternal love to Wales’. Even if the whole world says it is a lie, my feelings alone are not a lie. Therefore, let us go, Louise.”

“Princess!”

“It’s an order, Louise Françoise. My last one, from me to you. Please, step out of our way.”

Louise’s hand that was aiming the wand dropped down to her side. Understanding Henrietta’s firm decision, she helplessly gave in. Why should she stop such said strong love…

The line of deceased people tried to pass through the dumbfounded Louise.

But, before them…

Saito, holding Derflinger, blocked the way.

He was terribly sad. He understood Henrietta's feelings. But Saito’s mind could not permit it. His mind screamed that he should not let it happen. Saito said in a voice that contained sadness and anger.

“Princess, if I am allowed to say, talking in one's sleep is not good.”

His shoulders and body trembled.

“Passion, love, being together with a woman, not caring about anything else. Is such love true? It is just a mere blindness. Blood goes up to the head and one cannot think straight.”

“Leave! It’s an order!”

Henrietta shrieked with all her remaining dignity.

"Unfortunately, I am not your subordinate. Your orders mean nothing to me. Even if you keep on ordering me… I won’t listen. I will cut through that spell of yours.”

It was Wales who moved first. Though he tried to utter a spell, Saito jumped at him.

However, a wall of water blew Saito off.

Petrified Henrietta, gripping the wand, trembled.

“I won’t allow you to lay even a single finger on Wales.”

The crushing wall of water moved to Saito again. However, the space in front of Henrietta exploded in the next moment. Henrietta was blown away.

Louise had cast an explosion spell.

“Even though you are a princess, I won’t allow you to lay a single finger on my familiar, either.”

With her hair ruffled, Louise muttered in a shaking voice.

Due to this explosion, Tabitha and Kirche, who had been watching the scene in blank surprise, started chanting spells as well.

The fight started.

Saito kept on blocking the magic spells with his sword, in front of Louise.

Though the magic flitted around, no one was wounded seriously. Though Tabitha’s and Kirche’s unleashed magic was knocking down the enemies, the enemies themselves preserved their willpower, hoping to weaken them up little by little with dot spells.

However, the enemy's teamwork was skillful. Little by little, Saito and the others were cornered.

Before they realized it, Louise, Saito and the others were enclosed in a tight circle.

They were cornered in a defending position. The number of enemies was too great, thus there was no chance to attack.

Kirche released another fire ball, burning down a single mage.

“The flame is effective! It only has to burn!”

Kirche launched another flame attack. Tabitha switched the attack to cover Kirche at once. Saito also turned to support. The spells that flew at Kirche were inhaled by Derflinger.

The enemies recovered and tried to cut him with wind swords.

Yet, Kirche’s flame burned down another three of them…

The enemy dashed away from the range of her magic and then regrouped.

“The way it is, if you burn them by the flame little by little… we may have a chance to win.”

Kirche muttered.

However, heaven turned away from them.

Gradually, Tabitha noticed something wet hitting her cheek.

With a worried expression she looked up into the sky.

A huge cloud of rain segregated above them.

Rain that started as a light sprinkle, changed into a heavy pour soon.

Henrietta shouted.

“Throw your wands away! I do not want to kill you!”

“Just wake up, Princess! Please!”

Louise shouted, but her voice was drowned by the sounds of the increasingly heavier raindrops

“Look! Rain! Rain! ‘Water’ spells will always win in the rain! Thanks to this rain, our victory was decided!”

“Is that so?”

Saito shouted anxiously. Kirche, who was about to say that, nodded as if she were expressing her disappointment.

“Really, the Princess can cast a wall of water on us with this. My flame is worthless now. Tabitha’s wind and even your sword cannot damage them… Well, it is over. We are defeated!”

Louise muttered in a constrained voice.

“Though I do not want this, let’s run away. We cannot die here.”

“But how can we run away? We are surrounded, aren’t we?”

Everyone became silent.

Then Derflinger thoughtfully voiced out.

“Aah.”

“What?”

“I recalled. They use a very nostalgic magic…”

“Yes?”

“When I saw the water spirit, it tickled something in the back of my mind… No, partner, sorry – I forgot. I recalled it!”

"What?!”

“Their and our source is the same type of magic. Anyway, it is different from the base of your four great element system - magic of 'Life’”

“What?! Legendary sword! Say something only if you have something useful to say! Good-for-nothing!”

“The good-for-nothing is you. Though being a ‘Void’ user, firing ‘Explosion’ in rapid succession is foolish, I saw and remembered. Though that person might be very strong, the amount of willpower consumed is immense. Like today, launching huge ones like that may require a year to shoot again. We need different fireworks today.”

“Well?!”

“Turn the pages of the prayer book. Dear Brimir, great guy. He sure has some perfect counter.”

Louise looked through pages, like she was told.

However, besides the ‘Explosion’ it was blank as usual.

“There isn’t even written anything! White-on-white!”

“Turn further. If in need, you will be able to read.”

Louise saw the page on which the letters were written.

It was written down in runes of an ancient language.

“…Dispel Magic?”

“That’s right. ‘Release’. The potion that you took a while ago is the reason why you can read it.”

Henrietta sadly shook her head. Though she told Louise to run away, because of the rain, she didn’t run away. Moreso, Louise stepped closer into the center of

the tight circle.

Looking up, Henrietta began to utter an incantation. I *do not want to kill if possible. However, if you keep on blocking my way…*

With Henrietta’s cantrip aria, the raindrops began to harden.

One by one the ally mages had an armor of water hanging on them. The enemy's 'Flame' was sealed off with this.

In addition, Henrietta uttered another incantation.

Wales’ spell joined with hers. Wales watched Henrietta, smiling coldly. Though she noticed the lack of warmth, Henrietta’s heart still felt moistly hot.

They both were surrounded by the tornado of water.

'Water', 'Water', 'Water', and, 'Wind.', 'Wind', 'Wind'

The sixth power – water and wind

Triangle mages usually cannot make such strong spells as this. To say almost never, would not be an exaggeration. However, the chosen blood of the royal family enables it.

Only the royal family were able to do a hexagon spell.

Their combined spell increased to an impossible size.

Two triangles intertwined, creating a huge tornado of six.

The tornado was like a tsunami. If hit, it could even blow away a castle.

The sound of Louise’s chanting mixed with the sound of rainfall.

Behind Saito's back, Louise's spell could be cast comfortably.

To Louise nothing was impossible today. She kept on concentrating her willpower while uttering sounds of ancient runes one after another with her mouth.

“What’s wrong with this girl?”

Kirche asked with a smile.

“Aah, she's just acting like a legend for now.” Saito grasped the sword and answered in a joking voice. Hearing Louise casting a ‘Void’ spell gave him courage. Courage that allowed him to smile. Courage that can turn death into a joke.

“So. It is good and all. Yet if that ‘Legend’ doesn’t leak something at least, we won’t be able to win against that tornado.”

The huge tornado of water whirling around Wales and Henrietta's grew rapidly.

Louise's silent chant continued still. As expected from ‘Void’. It was as lengthy as one could be.

“This is bad. The other side is faster after all.”

Derflinger muttered.

“What to do?”

“You should know what to do. It is your work to stop that tornado, Gandálfr.”

“My wha-?”

Saito’s face twitched. Yet, he was not scared. The hard-handed courage shook his whole body.

“No, I wonder.”

“What?”

“Aren’t you scared of such a huge tornado?”

“It may be so. You misunderstood, Gandálfr. Your work is not to attack the enemy but to defend your master while the spell is chanted. This is your only work.”

“But it’s not easy.”

“You gain the courage while hearing your master’s spell. Your face reddens, you want to laugh out loudly, your pulse quickens. This all has a reason.”

“I leave it to you,” Kirche muttered.

Tabitha watched Saito's face.

“Easy victory.”

Saito muttered, “I am the familiar of Void.”

Wales and Henrietta’s spell was completed. The huge tornado of undulating water flew towards Saito and the others. Though it was huge, it was also surprisingly fast.

It was like a castle of water. A castle of water that was swirling around viciously and trying to swallow them.

Grasping Derflinger, Saito dashed towards the tornado using dancer’s steps and pushed Derflinger into the core of the rotating tornado of water.

Though he was almost swallowed, he stood firmly on his feet.

Pain assaulted his body. He could not breathe. The water viciously hit him, tearing his skin off.

However, Saito endured.

His fingernails ripped off.

His eardrums tore.

His eyelids were cut, raging pain ran through his eyeballs.

He could not breathe.

The right arm released the sword as joints broke.

Derflinger was swallowed by the water.

The moment when everything seemed to tumble down, Louise finished her spell.

Even though he could not hear a sound or see anything, Saito could feel it.

“At last, idiot.” Saito muttered and lost consciousness.

Before Louise’s eyes, who completed her spell, a huge tornado raged. However, it didn’t reach her. Saito stood in the middle of the tornado, and she could see him desperately enduring the pain.

Eventually Saito lost to the raging force of nature and crumbled to the ground before the massive waterfall leaving a small gap in it.

Louise bit her lip. Through the gap she aimed her ‘Dispel Magic’ at the enemy.

Henrietta’s surroundings turned into dazzling shining light.

With a thump the body of Wales, who stood next to her, crumbled to the ground. Though Henrietta tried to run up to him, she lost consciousness as completion of the spell took all of her willpower and she toppled to the ground.

All at once, she was wrapped in silence.

# Epilogue

Henrietta lost consciousness for a while, but she woke up to a voice calling her name.

Louise was peering at her worriedly.

The rain had stopped. The grass nearby was wet and enveloped by a cool atmosphere.

*It was as if the violent battle just now was a lie*, Henrietta thought.

However, it wasn't a lie. Wales' cold corpse was laying beside her. The other cold corpses were scattered around her. It was the end of the ones who were given fake life by the Ring of Andvari. Becasue of Louise's "Dispel Magic", the fake life disappeared and they returned to their original forms, though Henrietta did not know the reason. It was just that, she felt that the things that needed to be had returned to where they should be. And, that was enough for now.

She wanted to think it was a dream. But, everything was a nightmare-like reality. And she herself, had tried to throw away everything and surrender herself to that nightmare.

Henrietta covered her face with her hands. Right now, she had no right to cling to Wales' corpse. Much less did she have the face to look at the Louise in front of her, who had loved her since they were young.

"Just what have I done?"

"Have you woken up?"

Louise asked Henrietta in a sad and cold voice. There was no sign of anger. There were some things that needed to be thought about, but it was the usual Louise.

Henrietta nodded.

"What should I say to apologize to you? What should I say in order to ask for forgiveness from the people hurt by me? Please tell me, Louise."

"More importantly, Princess-sama's powers are needed."

Louise pointed to the collapsed Saito.

"What horrible injuries."

"He had been swallowed by that tornado. Please heal him with your 'water'."

Henrietta nodded and chanted a rune. By the power of the royal family's wand that stored the power of "water", Saito's wounds started to close up. Saito's eyes widened when he realized that the one healing his wounds was Henrietta.

"I do not have any words of apology. Are there any other people injured?"

There were several surviving nobles of the griffin squad. Henrietta healed their wounds one at a time.

And then... without caring about whether one was an ally or enemy, the corpses were carried into the shade of a tree. Even if the corpses were going to be buried later, they could not just leave them as they were.

Louise and the others... Even Kirche, even Tabitha, did not condemn Henrietta. Henrietta had been seeing a nightmare. A sweet, tempting dream. If they had to hate someone, it would be the person who gave Wales fake life and took advantage of Henrietta's heart like this. It cannot be said that Henrietta was sinless herself, but it was also truth that there was an existence that profited from that sin.

Henrietta was trying to move Wales at the end.

At that time...

Henrietta saw something she couldn't believe at all.

Perhaps, Henrietta's sorrowful love had reached somewhere.

Maybe, someone softly, to heal her sin, softly tipped the scales of life.

When Henrietta touched Wales' cheek, his eyelids weakly opened.

"...Henrietta? Is it you?"

It was a weak and fading voice, but it was Wales' voice without a doubt. Henrietta's shoulders shook. If miracles existed in Halkeginia, times like this were definitely that.

That is because no one can explain the reason why the light of life that should have disappeared was given a mere glow. It is possible that when Louise's "Dispel Magic" blew away the fake life, Wales' barely remaining breath of life lit the fire.

It was possible that the feelings Henrietta felt for Wales called upon a whim from the gods. No one knows why. Just that, Wales opened his eyes. That was the truth.

"Wales-sama..."

Henrietta called her lover's name. She understood. The Wales this time was the true Wales. Not a puppet that moved with fake life, but the true him.

Tears flowed from Henrietta's eyes.

"What a thing. Just how long have I waited for this moment..."

The group rushed over with surprised faces.

The eyes of the group widened when they saw that Wales had opened his eyes.

At that moment, Henrietta saw that a red stain was spreading over Wales' white shirt. The wound caused by Wardes's thrust that was closed by the fake life had opened.

Panicking, Henrietta chanted a spell to close up the wound.

However... Cruelly so, Henrietta's magic did not work on that wound. Without the wound closing up, the stain of blood only grew bigger.

"Wales-sama, don't... No, why..."

"It's no use... Henrietta. This wound will no longer close. Bodies that have died once will no longer revive. I have probably only come back a bit, just a bit. Perhaps, this is the whim of the water spirit."

"Wales-sama, no, no... Do you plan to leave me alone again?"

"Henrietta. I have one last wish."

"Don't say something like 'last'."

"I want to go to that Ragdorian Lake, where I met you for the first time. There is something I want you to promise there."

Tabitha pulled along her wind dragon. Saito and Kirche set Wales on its back. Following that, Henrietta, who was riding on the wind dragon, placed Wales' head on her knees and supported his body to keep it from falling.

Carrying the group, the wind dragon soared up.

Aiming for Ragdorian Lake, the wind dragon flew straight towards it.

At Ragdorian Lake, Wales leaned his body on Henrietta as they walked on the shore. The sky was beginning to whiten. Morning was close.

"How nostalgic."

"Yes."

"When we first met, I thought you looked like a fairy. See, you were bathing around here."

Wales pointed to one spot. He probably could already no longer see. That spot was completely different from the one in Henrietta's memories.

However, Henrietta nodded. Desperately restraining herself from crying,

"Oh, you're as skilled as ever."

"At that time, this was what I thought. If we just threw everything away like this. Anywhere is fine. The location doesn't matter. It's enough to just have a small house with a garden. Aah, a flower bed is necessary. A flower bed for you to grow flowers in."

It was like power drained from Wales' legs every step he took.

"Hey, I always wanted to ask you. At that time, why did you not say those kind words? Why did you not tell me that you love me? I have always waited for those words."

Wales smiled.

"I could not speak those words, knowing it would make you unhappy."

"What are you saying? It was my joy to be loved by you."

Wales fell silent. Henrietta felt the life disappearing from her beloved Wales' body little by little. For him to have lasted so long could be called a miracle.

However, she couldn't cry. In the time remaining, she wanted to exchange words with him as much as possible. Even so, her voice was trembling.

Mustering his energy, Wales stated.

"Swear, Henrietta."

"I will swear about anything. What should I swear about? Please tell me."

"To forget me. Swear that you will forget me and find another man to love. I want to hear those words. At this Ragdorian Lake. In front of the water spirit, I want to hear you pledge that."

"Do not say the impossible. I cannot swear such a thing. There is no way I could swear a lie."

Henrietta froze in her track. Her shoulders were trembling.

"Please, Henrietta. Otherwise, my soul will probably wander for eternity. Do you want me to be unhappy?"

Henrietta shook her head.

"No. I definitely don't want to."

"There is no time. There, there is no time anymore. I am already... That's why, please..."

"Then, then swear. Swear that you love me. By now, you should be able to swear that, right? If you swear to that, then I will swear as well."

"I will."

Henrietta, with a sad expression, spoke the words of oath.

"...I swear. To forget about Wales-sama. And also, to find someone else to love."

Wales said in a satisfied manner, "Thank you."

"Next, is your turn. Please."

"I will. Bring me to the waterside."

Henrietta brought Wales to the waterside. The morning sun poked through the spaces between the tree, and with a beauty unthinkable in this world, the Ragdorian Lake glittered.

Their legs got soaked in water.

Henrietta griped Wales' shoulders.

"Now, say it. To love me. It is fine for just this moment. I will embrace this moment for eternity. No matter what you say, I will embrace it. Got it?"

However, Wales did not reply.

"Wales-sama?"

Henrietta shook his shoulders. But, Wales had already died.

She slowly recalled the days here, where she met Wales for the first time.

As if to take each memory one by one from a treasure box and check it.

The fun and glittering days will no longer come.

The words of pledge exchanged at this lake, no longer can be protected.

"What a mean person."

Looking straight ahead, Henrietta whispered.

"To the end, you never spoke those words of oath."

Slowly, Henrietta closed her eyes.

From her closed eyelids, a line of tears flowed down her cheek.

Saito, who was watching over the two from the shade, was holding Louise's shoulders. Louise was quietly looking at Henrietta, killing her voice while crying.

While holding her shoulders, Saito thought.

*Was I right?*

At that time, would letting Henrietta go, like she said... be happier for her? Even if it was fake life, even if it was fake love... If the actual person believed it was

real, isn't that fine itself?

While holding Louise's shoulders, who was crying like a child, Saito had continued to constantly think about that. What was right, and what was wrong... Even after this, there will probably be other things to make him worry, Saito thought faintly.

Even after this, there will probably be times where he will be pressed to make a decision like this time.

Saito embraced Louise firmly.

At least, when that time comes... for he, himself, not to waver, Saito prayed.

Henrietta laid Wales' corpse in the water.

Then she waved her wand slightly, and chanted a rune.

The lake water moved, slowly carrying Wales' body into the water, where it sank.

The water was ever so deeply transparent, and the sinking corpse of Wales could be seen clearly.

Even after she was unable to see Wales anymore, Henrietta remained still.

Even when the lake surface reflected the light of the sun and started scattering the seven prismatic colors of light around the area... Henrietta continued to look for eternity.